

REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

Independent claim 1 has been amended to recite the subject matter of dependent claims 5, 8, and 10. Independent claim 19 has been amended to recite the subject matter of dependent claims 23, 26, and 28. The pending claims have also been amended to improve antecedent basis and to improve the clarity thereof. No new matter has been added.

The specification has been amended to correct grammatical and typographical errors. No new matter has been added.

The Office Action mailed September 7, 2004, has been received and reviewed.

Claims 1-33 are currently pending in the application. Claims 1-33 stand rejected. Although claims 5 and 6 have been rejected, the indication of allowable subject matter in such claims is noted with appreciation. Applicants have amended claims 1-4, 6, 7, 9, 11-22, 24, 25, 27, and 29, canceled claims 5, 8, 10, 23, 26, and 28, and respectfully request reconsideration of the application as amended herein.

Claim Objections

Claims 5-11 are objected to because of writing informalities. The Examiner states that “these claims are drawn to, ‘a thermoplastic elastomer as defined in claim 1;’ however claim 1 is drawn to a method of preparing a thermoplastic elastomer.” Office Action of September 7, 2004, p. 2. Claims 5, 8, and 10 have been canceled, rendering moot the objection as to these claims. However, in regard to claims 6, 7, 9, and 11, Applicants respectfully submit that these claims are drawn to a method as defined in independent claim 1. Therefore, the Examiner’s objection should be withdrawn.

Applicants note that there appears to be a discrepancy between the pending claims on file with the United States Patent and Trademark Office (the “Office”) and the claims used by the Examiner in preparing the outstanding Office Action. Applicants contacted the Examiner on October 28, 2004, and also ordered a copy of the file-to-date from the Office in an attempt to clarify the discrepancy. After reviewing the file-to-date, Applicants believe that the instant application has been confused with a co-pending application provided to the Office on the same date, as explained in detail below.

The instant application, Serial No. 09/831,411 entitled “Method for the Synthesis of Energetic Thermoplastic Elastomers in Non-Halogenated Solvents,” was filed with the Office on May 7, 2001, under 35 U.S.C. § 371. (Emphasis added). As described in the “Transmittal Letter to the United States Designated/Elected Office (DO/EO/US) Concerning a Filing Under 35 U.S.C. 371” (the “Transmittal Letter”), the instant application is a national stage application of PCT/US99/24013, which includes 33 claims and claims priority to a provisional application having a Serial No. of 60/108,455. The Transmittal Letter also indicates that the instant application includes 33 claims.

In addition to the instant application, a Preliminary Amendment and an Information Disclosure Statement (“IDS”) were filed with the Office on May 7, 2001. In the Preliminary Amendment, claims 1-4, 19-22, and 30-33 were amended. In regard to the IDS, a copy of a co-pending application having the Serial No. 09/436,440 and entitled “Synthesis of Energetic Thermoplastic Elastomers Containing Oligomeric Urethane Linkages” was provided. (Emphasis added). This co-pending application includes claims 1-30, which are drawn to a thermoplastic elastomer, and claims priority to a provisional application having a Serial No. of 60/108,456.

After reviewing the file-to-date, it appears that upon receipt of these documents by the Office, the copy of the co-pending application provided with the IDS was incorrectly stamped with the Serial No. of 09/831,411 rather than the instant application being stamped with that Serial No. Applicants note that the co-pending application provided with the IDS includes claims 1-30, which are drawn to a thermoplastic elastomer, while the instant application includes claims 1-33, which are drawn to a method of preparing a thermoplastic elastomer. In addition, the co-pending application and the instant application have different titles. Since the Serial No. of 09/831,411 was incorrectly stamped on the copy of the co-pending application provided with the IDS, Applicants believe that the Examiner has relied on the claims of the co-pending application, rather than the claims of the instant application, in preparing the outstanding Office Action.

Applicants respectfully submit that the Serial No. of 09/831,411, which is currently stamped on the copy of the co-pending application entitled “Synthesis of Energetic Thermoplastic Elastomers Containing Oligomeric Urethane Linkages” in the Office file, has been

stamped on the wrong application. Applicants respectfully request that the application entitled “Method for the Synthesis of Energetic Thermoplastic Elastomers in Non-Halogenated Solvents,” be properly indicated in the Office file with the Serial No. of 09/831,411.

In responding to the outstanding Office Action, the claims presented herein reflect the claims filed with the Office on May 7, 2001, which were based on the claims in PCT/US99/24013, as amended by the Preliminary Amendment filed on May 7, 2001.

35 U.S.C. § 112 Claim Rejections

Claims 5 and 6 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 112, second paragraph, as being indefinite for failing to particularly point out and distinctly claim the subject matter which Applicants regard as the invention. The Examiner states that there is insufficient antecedent basis for the phrase “the difunctional oligomer” in these claims. Office Action of September 7, 2004, p. 2. Applicants respectfully traverse this rejection, as hereinafter set forth.

Applicants respectfully submit that pending claims 5 and 6 do not recite the phrase “the difunctional oligomer.” Rather, claims 5 and 6 recite that the non-halogenated solvent comprises one or more organic ethers, such as one or more members selected from the group consisting of tetrahydrofuran, ethylene glycol dimethyl ether, and 1,4-dioxane. Applicants believe that the confusion with claims 5 and 6 resulted for the same reasons discussed above in regard to the objection to claims 5-11. In addition, claim 5 has been canceled, rendering moot the rejection as to this claim.

Since claims 5 and 6 do not recite the phrase upon which this rejection is based, the indefiniteness rejection should be withdrawn.

35 U.S.C. § 103(a) Obviousness Rejections

Obviousness Rejection Based on U.S. Patent No. 4,806,613 to Wardle

Claims 1-4, 7-11, 19-22, and 30-33 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over U.S. Patent No. 4,806,613 to Wardle (“Wardle”). Claims 8 and 10 have been canceled, rendering moot the rejection as to these claims. Applicants respectfully traverse this rejection as to the remaining claims, as hereinafter set forth.

M.P.E.P. 706.02(j) sets forth the standard for an obviousness rejection:

To establish a *prima facie* case of obviousness, three basic criteria must be met. First, there must be some suggestion or motivation, either in the references themselves or in the knowledge generally available to one of ordinary skill in the art, to modify the reference or combine reference teachings. Second, there must be a reasonable expectation of success. Finally, the prior art reference (or references when combined) must teach or suggest all the claim limitations. The teaching or suggestion to make the claimed combination and the reasonable expectation of success must both be found in the prior art, and not based on applicant's disclosure. *In re Vaeck*, 947 F.2d 488, 20 USPQ2d 1438 (Fed. Cir. 1991).

The obviousness rejection of claims 1-4, 7, 9, 11, 19-22, and 30-33 is improper because the cited reference does not teach or suggest all of the claim limitations. In addition, there is no motivation to produce the claimed invention.

Wardle teaches a method of producing a thermoplastic elastomer having A blocks and at least one B block. Wardle at column 3, lines 64-67. The thermoplastic elastomer is used as a binder in a high energy composition. Wardle at column 6, lines 38-46. The A blocks are crystalline at a temperature below 60°C and are polyethers derived from monomers of oxetane and its derivatives and/or tetrahydrofuran and its derivatives. Wardle at column 3, line 67 through column 4, line 6. The B blocks are amorphous at a temperature above -20°C and are polyethers derived from monomers of oxetane and its derivatives and/or tetrahydrofuran and its derivatives. *Id.* The thermoplastic elastomer is prepared by separately forming the A blocks and the B blocks, which are then separately end-capped with a diisocyanate. Wardle at column 7, lines 38-44. The end-capped A blocks and B blocks are then joined by a linking compound. Wardle at column 7, lines 48-53. The end-capping and linking reactions are conducted in a solvent. Wardle at column 8, lines 60-62 and column 9, lines 18-19. The solvents used in the reactions that produce the thermoplastic elastomer include methylene chloride, carbon tetrachloride, methanol, or ethanol. See Examples 1-9 of Wardle.

As acknowledged by the Examiner, Wardle does not teach or suggest using at least one non-halogenated solvent. Office Action of September 7, 2004, p. 6. As such, Wardle necessarily does not teach or suggest the following limitations of claim 1: "dissolving A blocks and B blocks terminated with respective isocyanate-reactive groups into a solution comprising at least one non-

halogenated solvent selected from the group consisting of at least one organic ether, at least one organic ester, and at least one organic ketone," "drying the dissolved A blocks and the dissolved B blocks of water by azeotropic distillation of the at least one non-halogenated solvent," "end-capping the dried A blocks and the dried B blocks in the at least one non-halogenated solvent," and "linking the end-capped A blocks and the end-capped B blocks together in the at least one non-halogenated solvent with at least one linking compound."

Since Wardle does not teach or suggest all of the limitations of claim 1, the obviousness rejection is improper and should be withdrawn.

Dependent claims 2-4, 7, 9, and 11 are allowable, *inter alia*, as depending from claim 1, which is allowable.

Claim 4 is further allowable because Wardle does not teach that the reactions are conducted in the absence of a halogenated solvent. The section of Wardle cited by the Examiner merely teaches that a solvent is used.

Claims 7, 9, and 11 are further allowable because Wardle does not teach that the solvent used in the reaction is tetrahydrofuran, ethyl acetate, or methyl ethyl ketone.

Although the Examiner has not rejected claim 6, in light of the confusion with the pending claims, Applicants note that claim 6 is further allowable because Wardle does not teach or suggest that the solvent used in the reaction is tetrahydrofuran, ethylene glycol dimethyl ether, or 1,4-dioxane.

Wardle also does not provide a motivation to produce the claimed invention. To provide a motivation or suggestion to combine, the prior art or the knowledge of a person of ordinary skill in the art must "suggest the desirability of the combination" or provide "an objective reason to combine the teachings of the references." M.P.E.P. § 2143.01. The Examiner states that "it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of the invention to purify the elastomeric final product of Wardle with the additional steps of dissolving and drying the polymer blocks prior to end-capping and linking [sic] because the elastomeric final product of Wardle has the same utility as the instant invention and the mere purity of a product does not render the product (and its process of making) unobvious." Office Action of September 7, 2004, p. 6. The Examiner also states that "dissolving the polymer blocks into solution comprising at

least one non-halogenated solvent" and "drying the dissolved A and B blocks of water by azeotropic distillation of the non-halogenated solvent" "represent a purification of the starting materials, which in turn produces a purified elastomeric final product" and that "it appears that these purification steps provide an obvious variation of the prior art." *Id.*

However, this reasoning by the Examiner is not based on objective evidence of record. In addition, nothing in Wardle suggests the desirability of, or provides an objective reason for, using a non-halogenated solvent in the reactions to produce the thermoplastic elastomer. Furthermore, as described in M.P.E.P. § 2144.04, the "[f]actors to be considered in determining whether a purified form of an old product is obvious over the prior art include[s] . . . whether the prior art suggests the particular form or structure of the claimed material or suitable methods of obtaining that form or structure." Since Wardle does not teach or suggest using a non-halogenated solvent to produce the thermoplastic elastomer, Wardle does not teach or suggest a suitable method of obtaining the thermoplastic elastomer. As such, the claimed invention is nonobvious over Wardle.

In addition, Wardle teaches away from the claimed invention because Wardle teaches that "solvent processing is undesirable in that the propellant cannot be cast in a conventional manner, e.g., into a rocket motor casing. Furthermore, solvent-based processing presents problems with respect to removal and recovery of solvent." Wardle at column 2, lines 20-24.

Since the cited reference does not teach or suggest all of the claim limitations and does not provide a motivation to produce the claimed invention, the obviousness rejection of claims 1-4, 7, 9, and 11 is improper and should be withdrawn.

Independent claim 19 is allowable for substantially the same reasons as discussed above for claim 1. Specifically, since Wardle does not teach or suggest using a non-halogenated solvent, Wardle does not teach or suggest the following limitations of claim 19: "dissolving A blocks and B blocks terminated with respective isocyanate-reactive groups into a solution comprising at least one non-halogenated solvent selected from the group consisting of at least one organic ether, at least one organic ester, and at least one organic ketone," "drying the dissolved A blocks and the dissolved B blocks of water by azeotropic distillation of the at least one non-halogenated solvent," "end-capping the dried A blocks and the dried B blocks in the at

least one non-halogenated solvent,” and “linking the end-capped A blocks and the end-capped B blocks together in the at least one non-halogenated solvent with at least one linking compound.” In addition, Wardle does not provide a motivation to produce the claimed invention for the reasons previously discussed.

Dependent claims 20-22 and 30-33 are allowable, *inter alia*, as depending from claim 19, which is allowable.

Claim 22 is further allowable because Wardle does not teach that the reactions are conducted in the absence of a halogenated solvent. The section of Wardle cited by the Examiner merely teaches that a solvent is used.

Although the Examiner has not rejected claims 24, 25, 27, and 29, in light of the confusion with the pending claims, Applicants note that claims 24 and 25 are further allowable because Wardle does not teach or suggest that the solvent used in the reaction is tetrahydrofuran, ethylene glycol dimethyl ether, or 1,4-dioxane. Claim 27 is further allowable because Wardle does not teach or suggest that the solvent used in the reaction is ethyl acetate. Claim 29 is further allowable because Wardle does not teach or suggest that the solvent used in the reaction is methyl ethyl ketone.

Double Patenting Rejection Based on U.S. Patent Application No. 09/436,440 in View of U.S. Patent No. 4,806,613

Claims 12-18, 23, and 24 stand provisionally rejected under the judicially created doctrine of obviousness-type double patenting as being unpatentable over claims 1-6 and 11 of co-pending Application No. 09/436,440 in view of Wardle. Applicants note that co-pending Application No. 09/436,440 used in the double patenting rejection is the same co-pending application as discussed above in the claim objections to claims 5-11.

The Examiner states that claims 12-18, 23, and 24 are directed to a binder. Office Action of September 7, 2004, p. 7. However, claims 12-18 of the instant application are dependent method claims that depend on claim 1, which is a method claim. Claims 23 and 24 of the instant application are dependent method claims that depend on claim 19, which is a method claim. Since claims 12-18 are dependent on independent claim 1, these claims include the limitations of

claim 1. As such, claims 12-18 include the limitations that a non-halogenated solvent is used to prepare the thermoplastic elastomer. However, nothing in claims 1-6 and 11 of co-pending Application No. 09/436,440 teaches or suggests using a non-halogenated solvent. In addition, as discussed previously, Wardle does not teach or suggest using a non-halogenated solvent.

Claim 23 has been canceled, rendering the double patent rejection moot as to this claim.

Claim 24 is dependent on independent claim 19 and, therefore, includes the limitations that a non-halogenated solvent is used to prepare the thermoplastic elastomer. However, nothing in claims 1-6 and 11 of co-pending Application No. 09/436,440 or in Wardle teaches or suggests using a non-halogenated solvent. As such, claims 12-18 and 24 of the instant application are nonobvious over claims 1-6 and 11 of co-pending Application No. 09/436,440 in view of Wardle. Therefore, Applicants respectfully request that the double patenting rejection be withdrawn.

Double Patenting Rejection Based on U.S. Patent Application No. 09/436,440

Claims 25-29 stand provisionally rejected under the judicially created doctrine of obviousness-type double patenting as being unpatentable over claims 1-6 of co-pending Application No. 09/436,440. The Examiner states that claims 25-29 are directed to a method of preparing a thermoplastic elastomer. However, claims 25-29 of the instant application are dependent claims that depend from claim 19. As such, claims 25-29 include the limitations that a non-halogenated solvent is used to prepare the thermoplastic elastomer. Since claims 1-6 of co-pending Application No. 09/436,440 do not teach or suggest using a non-halogenated solvent, Applicants respectfully request that the double patenting rejection be withdrawn.

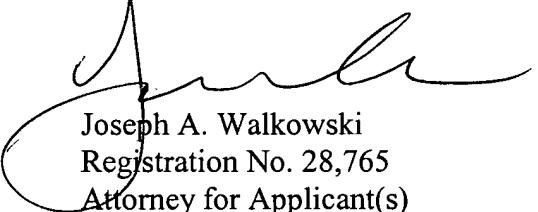
ENTRY OF AMENDMENTS

The amendments to claims 1-4, 6, 7, 9, 11-22, 24, 25, 27, and 29 above should be entered by the Examiner because the amendments are supported by the as-filed specification and drawings and do not add new matter to the application.

CONCLUSION

Claims 1-4, 6, 7, 9, 11-22, 24, 25, 27, and 29-33 are believed to be in condition for allowance, and an early notice thereof is respectfully solicited. Should the Examiner determine that additional issues remain which might be resolved by a telephone conference, he is respectfully invited to contact Applicants' undersigned attorney.

Respectfully submitted,



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Document in ProLaw

Enclosures: Appendix A (clean version of substitute specification)
Appendix B (marked-up version of substitute specification showing changes made)

PATENT
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APPLICATION FOR LETTERS PATENT

for

METHOD FOR THE SYNTHESIS OF ENERGETIC THERMOPLASTIC
ELASTOMERS IN NON-HALOGENATED SOLVENTS

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METHOD FOR THE SYNTHESIS OF ENERGETIC THERMOPLASTIC ELASTOMERS IN NON-HALOGENATED SOLVENTS

[0001] This is a national stage application under 37 U.S.C. § 371 of PCT/US99/24013 filed on November 9, 1999.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

[0002] This invention relates to a method of synthesizing energetic thermoplastic elastomers which are useful as binders of high energy compositions, such as rocket motor propellants, gun propellants, explosive munitions, gas generators of vehicle supplemental restraint systems, or the like.

2. Description of the Related Art

[0003] Solid high energy compositions, such as propellants, explosives, gas generators, and the like comprise solid particulates, such as fuel particulates and/or oxidizer particulates, dispersed and immobilized throughout a polymeric binder matrix.

[0004] Conventional solid composite propellant binders utilize cross-linked elastomers in which prepolymers are cross-linked by chemical curing agents. As outlined in detail in U.S. Patent No. 4,361,526, there are important disadvantages to using cross-linked elastomers as binders. Cross-linked elastomers must be cast within a short period of time after addition of the curative, which time period is known as the "pot life." Disposal of a cast, cross-linked propellant composition is difficult, and usually is accomplished by burning, which poses environmental problems. Furthermore, current state-of-the-art propellant compositions have serious problems that include their use of nonenergetic binders which have lower performance and high end-of-mix viscosities.

[0005] In view of the inherent disadvantages associated with the use of cross-linked elastomeric polymers as binder materials, there has been considerable interest in developing thermoplastic elastomers suitable as binders for solid, high energy compositions. However,

many thermoplastic elastomers fail to meet important requirements expected of propellant formulations, particularly the requirement of being processible below about 120°C, it being desirable that a thermoplastic elastomeric polymer for use as a binder in a high energy system have a melting temperature of between about 60°C and about 120°C. The melting temperature is desirably at least about 60°C because the propellant composition may be subject to somewhat elevated temperatures during storage and transport, and significant softening of the propellant composition at such elevated temperatures is unwanted. The setting of the melting temperature at not more than about 120°C is determined by the instability, at elevated temperatures, of many components which ordinarily go into high energy compositions, particularly oxidizer particulates and energetic plasticizers. Many thermoplastic elastomers exhibit high melt viscosities which preclude high solids loading and many show considerable creep and/or shrinkage after processing. Thermoplastic elastomers typically obtain their thermoplastic properties from segments that form glassy domains which may contribute to physical properties adverse to their use as binders. Cross-linkable thermoplastic elastomers are block copolymers with the property of forming physical cross-links at predetermined temperatures. One thermoplastic elastomer, e.g., Kraton, brand TPE, obtains this property by having the glass transition point of one component block above room temperature. At temperatures below 109°C, the glassy blocks of Kraton form glassy domains and thus physically cross-link the amorphous segments. The strength of these elastomers depends upon the degree of phase separation. Thus, it remains desirable to have controlled, but significant, immiscibility between the two types of blocks, which is a function of their chemical structure and molecular weight. On the other hand, as the blocks become more immiscible, the melt viscosity increases, thus having a deleterious effect on the processibility of the material.

[0006] The above-mentioned U.S. Patent No. 4,361,526 proposes a thermoplastic elastomeric binder which is a block copolymer of a diene and styrene, the styrene blocks providing a meltable crystal structure and the diene blocks imparting rubbery or elastomeric properties to the copolymer. The '526 patent states that this polymer is processed with a volatile organic solvent. Solvent processing is undesirable inasmuch as the dissolved composition cannot be cast in a conventional manner, e.g., into a rocket motor casing. Furthermore, solvent-based processing presents problems with respect to removal and recovery of solvent.

[0007] The preparation of energetic thermoplastic elastomers prepared from polyoxetane block copolymers has been proposed in U.S. Patent No. 4,483,978 to Manser and U.S. Patent No. 4,806,613 to Wardle (“the ‘613 patent”), the complete disclosures of which are incorporated herein by reference to the extent that these disclosures are compatible with this invention. According to the latter, these materials overcome the disadvantages associated with conventional cross-linked elastomers such as limited pot-life, high end-of-mix viscosity, and scrap disposal problems.

[0008] The thermoplastic materials proposed by the ‘613 patent involve elastomers having both (A) and (B) blocks, each derived from cyclic ethers, such as oxetane and oxetane derivatives and tetrahydrofuran (THP) and tetrahydrofuran derivatives. The monomer or combination of monomers of the (A) blocks are selected for providing a crystalline structure at usual ambient temperatures, such as below about 60°C, whereas the monomer or combination of monomers of the (B) blocks are selected to ensure an amorphous structure at usual ambient temperatures, such as above about -20°C. Typical of these materials is the random block copolymer (poly(3-azidomethyl-3-methyloxetane)-poly(3,3-bis(azidomethyl)oxetane), also known as poly(AMMO/BAMO). These block copolymers have good energetic and mechanical properties. Additionally, the block copolymers can be processed without solvents to serve as binders in high performance, reduced vulnerability explosive, propellant, and gas generant formulations. Advantageously, the block copolymers exhibit good compatibility with most materials used in such energetic formulations.

[0009] However, the processing techniques disclosed in the ‘978 and ‘613 patents involve the use of halogenated solvents, such as methylene chloride. Several drawbacks have been associated with the use of the halogenated solvents disclosed in the ‘978 and ‘613 patents. One drawback is the detrimental impact that halogenated solvents have on the environment. Another drawback of halogenated solvents is attributable to the additional drying steps which the pre-polymer blocks are subject to after their formation. The pre-polymer blocks are typically dried either with chemical drying agent, e.g., desiccants followed by filtration or by the azeotropic removal of water. The azeotropic removal of water is performed with toluene, which is different from the solvent selected for linking the pre-polymer blocks. The performance of an additional drying step and the use of different solvents in the azeotropic drying step and the

linking step complicate processing and increase overall processing time. Moreover, toluene does not completely dissolve the end-capped blocks prior to the linking reaction and can interfere with the end-capping and linking catalysts. Yet another drawback associated with halogenated solvents is the relatively low concentrations of pre-polymer blocks and linking compounds that may be loaded in halogenated solvents for processing. The loading of the thermoplastic elastomer ingredients is limited by the solubility of the ingredients in the solvent. For example, the currently used process for forming thermoplastic elastomers by linking energetic polyether diols and diisocyanates typically use approximately 30-40% by weight solutions of the reactants in dichloromethane and 0.1% by weight tin catalyst. Additionally, completion of the reaction in halogenated solvents typically takes several days to a week.

[0010] United States Patent No. 4,393,199 to Manser describes the use of a non-halogenated solvent, nitromethane, during cationic polymerization of cyclic ethers. However, it has been found that cyclic ether pre-polymer blocks are not sufficiently soluble in nitromethane to adequately link the pre-polymer blocks once they are formed.

[0011] It would therefore be a significant advancement in the art to provide a synthesis route to making energetic thermoplastic elastomer binders which avoids the drawbacks associated with halogenated solvents while reducing processing time and increasing productivity.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0012] It is, therefore, an object of this invention to provide a method for the synthesis of energetic thermoplastic elastomers that addresses the aforementioned problems associated with the related art and realizes the advancement expressed above.

[0013] In accordance with the principles of this invention, these and other objects are attained by a method of synthesizing an energetic thermoplastic elastomer binder that is in a solid state at room temperature and is derived from A blocks which are crystalline at temperatures below about 60°C and B blocks which are amorphous at temperatures above about -20°C. The A blocks may include one or more polyethers derived from monomers of oxetane derivatives and/or tetrahydrofuran derivatives. The B blocks may include one or more polyethers derived from monomers of oxetane and its derivatives, tetrahydrofuran and its derivatives, and/or oxirane and its derivatives. The polyoxetane blocks A and polyoxirane

blocks B may be linked by end-capping the blocks with diisocyanates and linking the end-capped blocks with difunctional linking chemicals in which each of the two terminal functional groups are reactive with an isocyanate moiety of the diisocyanate.

[0014] In accordance with one embodiment of this method, the A and B blocks are dissolved into solution comprising one or more non-halogenated solvents. The solvent or solvents selected preferably are capable of dissolving more than 25% by weight of the blocks (based on total weight of the solvents and blocks) into solution, more preferably at least 35% by weight into solution, and still more preferably 50% by weight into solution. The solvents preferably do not interfere with the end capping catalyst, such as dibutyl tin dilaurate. Representative solvents include ethers, esters, and ketones. Tetrahydrofuran is the preferred solvent because of its excellent solubility. The A and B blocks are mixed together at approximately the stoichiometric ratios that the blocks are intended to be present in the energetic thermoplastic elastomer. The solution is then dried by azeotropic removal of water with excess solvent. The A and B blocks are end-capped in the solvent with one or more diisocyanates. The end-capping may be performed prior or subsequent to the mixing step, but subsequent to the drying step. The diisocyanate preferably has one isocyanate moiety which is more reactive, preferably at least about five times more reactive with the terminal hydroxyl group of each of the blocks than the other isocyanate moiety, whereby the more reactive isocyanate moiety tends to react with the terminal-hydroxyl groups of the blocks, leaving the less reactive isocyanate moiety free and unreactive. The mixture is reacted with a chain extender having two isocyanate-reactive groups that are sufficiently unhindered to react with the free and unreacted isocyanate groups of the end-capped blocks. In this manner, the end-capped blocks are linked, but not cross-linked, to form a thermoplastic elastomer.

[0015] It is still a further object of this invention to provide a method for making propellants, especially rocket propellants and gun propellants, explosives, gas generants, or the like containing an energetic thermoplastic elastomer binder by procedures including the above-discussed method.

[0016] These and other objects, features, and advantages of the present invention will become apparent from the accompanying drawings and following detailed description which illustrate and explain, by way of example, the principles of this invention.

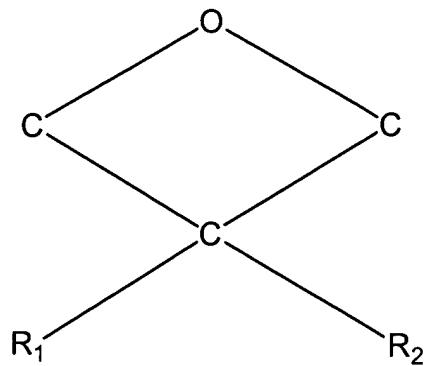
BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0017] The accompanying drawings are provided to facilitate an understanding of the principles of this invention. In such drawings, FIGS. 1 and 2 are graphs showing the properties of a thermoplastic elastomer prepared in accordance with an embodiment of this invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0018] The thermoplastic elastomer $(AB)_n$ polymers of this invention include A blocks which are crystalline at temperatures below about 60°C, preferably at temperatures below about 75°C, and B blocks which are amorphous at temperatures down to about -20°C. Each of the A and B blocks are polyethers derived from cyclic ethers. Specifically, the A blocks are derived from monomers of oxetane derivatives and/or THF derivatives. The B blocks are derived from monomers of oxetane and its derivatives, THF and its derivatives, and/or monomers of oxirane and its derivatives, preferably energetic oxirane derivatives. The polymers melt at temperatures between about 60°C and about 120°C, and more preferably between about 75°C and about 100°C. The A and B blocks are mutually miscible in the melt. Consequently, the melt viscosity of the block copolymer decreases rapidly as the temperature is raised above the melting point, whereby high energy formulations may include high solids content, e.g., up to about 95% by weight of solid particulates, and can be easily processed. The invention also includes other thermoplastic elastomer block structures, such as ABA tri-block polymers and A_nB star polymers. Contributing to the miscibility of the A and B blocks is their similar chemical structure.

[0019] Oxetane monomer units that may be used in forming the A and B blocks of the present invention have the general formula:

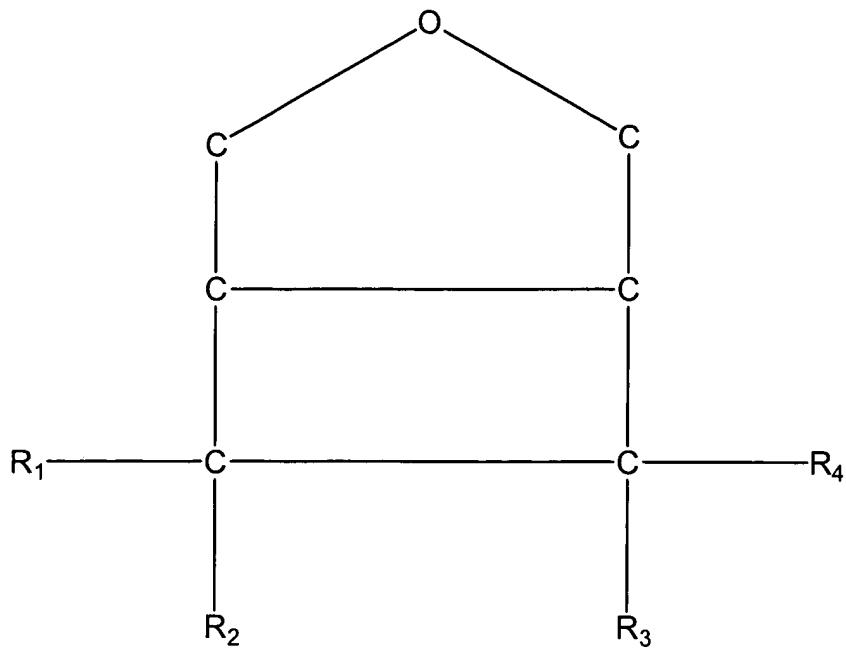


wherein the R₁ and R₂ groups are the same or different and are selected from moieties having the general formula: -(CH₂)_nX, where n is 0-10 and X is selected from the group consisting of -H, -NO₂, -CN, -Cl, -F, -O-alkyl, -OH, -I, -ONO₂, -N(NO₂)-alkyl, -C≡CH, -Br, -CH=CH(H or alkyl), -CO₂(H or alkyl), -N(H or alkyl)₂, -O-(CH₂)₁₋₅-O-(CH₂)₀₋₈-CH₃, and N₃.

[0020] Examples of oxetane derivatives that may be used in forming the A blocks in accordance with this invention are generally symmetrically substituted oxetanes including, but not limited to, the following: BEMO (3,3-(bis(ethoxymethyl)oxetane), BCMO (3,3-bis(chloromethyl)oxetane), BMMO (3,3-bis(methoxymethyl)oxetane), BFMO (3,3-bis(fluoromethyl)oxetane), BAOMO (3,3-bis(acetoxymethyl)oxetane), BHMO (3,3-bis(hydroxymethyl)oxetane), BMEMO (3,3-bis(methoxyethoxymethyl)oxetane), BIMO (3,3-bis(iodomethyl)oxetane), BNMO (3,3-bis(nitratomethyl)oxetane), BMNAMO (3,3-bis(methylnitraminomethyl)oxetane), and BAMO (3,3-bis(azidomethyl)oxetane).

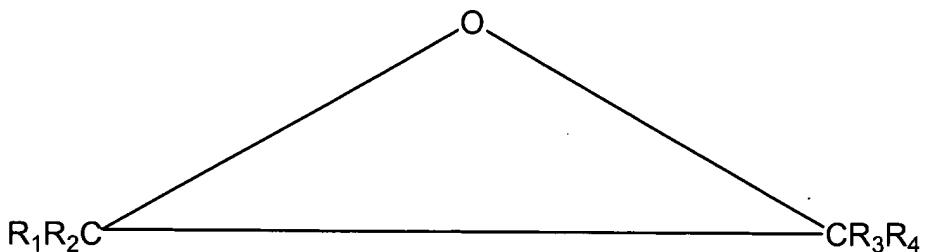
[0021] Examples of oxetane derivatives that may be used in forming the B blocks in accordance with this invention are generally unsymmetrically substituted oxetanes including, but not limited to, the following: HMMO (3-hydroxymethyl-3-methyloxetane), OMMO (3-octoxymethyl-3-methyloxetane), CMMO (3-chloromethyl-3-methyloxetane), AMMO (3-azidomethyl-3-methyloxetane), IMMO (3-iodomethyl-3-methyloxetane), PMMO (3-propynomethylmethyloxetane), NMMO (3-nitratomethyl-3-methyloxetane), and MNAMMO (3-methylnitraminomethyl-3-methyloxetane).

[0022] Tetrahydrofuran monomer units that may be used in forming the blocks of the present invention have the general formula:



wherein the R₁-R₄ groups are the same or different and are selected from moieties set forth above in connection with the description of suitable oxetane derivatives.

[0023] Oxirane monomer units used in forming the B blocks of the present invention have the general formula:



wherein R₁ and R₃ are independently selected from hydrogen and methyl, and R₂ and R₄ are independently selected from hydrogen, alkyl containing from 1 to 10 carbon atoms, chloroalkyl and bromoalkyl containing 1 to 2 carbon atoms, and nitratoalkyl, nitratoalkoxyalkyl, nitroalkyl, nitroalkoxyalkyl, azidoalkyl, azidoalkoxyalkyl, fluoronitroalkyl, and fluoronitroalkyoxyalkyl containing 1 to 5 carbon atoms provided that at least one of R₁ to R₄ is not hydrogen.

[0024] Examples of energetic oxiranes that may be used in forming the B blocks in accordance with this invention include, but are not limited to, glycidyl azide polymers ($C_3H_5N_3O$) (GAP), especially difunctional GAP, and poly(glycidyl nitrate) ($C_3H_5NO_4$) (PGN). These polymers have a glass transition temperature below about -20°C and are amorphous at temperatures above -20°C.

[0025] Forming thermoplastic elastomers in accordance with the invention involves (1) formation of at least one polyether-derived homopolymer, copolymer, or terpolymer serving as the A blocks and crystalline in nature with a relatively elevated melting point, i.e., between about 60°C and about 120°C, preferably near 80°C and (2) formation of at least one polyether-derived homopolymer, copolymer, or terpolymer serving as the B blocks and amorphous in structure with a glass transition temperature (T_g) below about -20°C.

[0026] The selection of the A block may be made based on the properties desired for the intended application of the thermoplastic elastomer. Examples of preferred crystalline A blocks include blocks possessing high energy density, such as those formed from BAMO and/or BMNAMO monomers. Melting temperature and ether oxygen content are additional factors that may be taken into consideration in selecting the monomers.

[0027] The properties of the block polymer depend upon the molecular weights of the individual blocks and the total molecular weights. Typically the A blocks have number average molecular weights ranging from about 3000 to about 8000, whereas the B blocks have number average molecular weights ranging from about 3000 to about 15,000. The weight ratio of A blocks to B blocks is preferably between about 15:85 to about 40:60. The preferred sizes of the A and B blocks for any particular binder application may be empirically determined.

[0028] The thermoplastic elastomers of this invention preferably are in a solid state at room temperature, have a weight average molecular weight of at least 40,000, more preferably at least 60,000, still more preferably at least 80,000, and a number average molecular weight of at least 10,000, more preferably at least 12,000, still more preferably at least 15,000.

[0029] Thermoplastic elastomers produced in accordance with the present invention may be admixed with other components of a high energy formulation, such as a propellant formulation. The binder system, in addition to the thermoplastic elastomers, may optionally contain one or more plasticizers for improving the resistance of the thermoplastic elastomer to

hardening at low temperatures, which may be included at a plasticizer-to-thermoplastic elastomer weight ratio of up to about 1:1. Suitable high energy plasticizers include glycidyl azide polymer (GAP), nitroglycerine, butanetriol trinitrate (BTTN), alkyl nitratomethyl nitramines, trimethylolethane trinitrate (TMETN), diethylene glycol dinitrate, triethylene glycol dinitrate (TEGDN), bis(dinitropropylacetal/-bis(dinitropropyl)formal (BDNPA/F), and mixtures thereof. Inert plasticizers can also be used. Representative inert plasticizers include, by way of example, dioctyladipate (DOA), isodecylperlargonate (IDP), dioctylphthalate (DOP), dioctylmaleate (DOM), dibutylphthalate (DBP), oleyl nitrile, triacetin, and combinations thereof. The binder system may also contain a minor amount of a wetting agent or lubricant that enables higher solids loading.

[0030] The solids content of the high energy composition generally ranges from about 50 wt% to about 95 wt%, higher solids loading generally being preferred so long as such loading is consistent with structural integrity. The solids include fuel material particles and powders (collectively referred to herein as particulates), such as particulate aluminum, and/or oxidizer particulates. Representative fuels include aluminum, magnesium, boron, and beryllium. Representative oxidizers and co-oxidizers include ammonium perchlorate; hydroxylammonium nitrate (HAN); ammonium dinitramide (ADN); hydrazinium nitroformate; ammonium nitrate; nitramines such as cyclotetramethylene tetranitramine (HMX) and cyclotrimethylene trinitramine (RDX), 2,4,6,8,10, 12-hexanitro-2,4,6,8,10,12-hexaazatetracyclo[5.5.0.0^{5,9}.0^{3,11}]-dodecane or 2,4,6,8,10,12-hexanitrohexaazaisowurtzitane (CL-20 or HNIW), and/or 4,10-dinitro-2,6,8,12-tetraoxa-4,10-diazatetracyclo[5.5.0.0^{5,9}.0^{3,11}]dodecane (TEX), and any combination thereof. In addition, the high energy composition may include minor amounts of additional components known in the art, such as bonding agents, burn rate modifiers, ballistic modifiers (e.g., lead), etc.

[0031] The thermoplastic elastomer may be mixed with the solids and other components of high energy formulation at temperatures above its melting temperature. Blending may be done in conventional mixing apparatus. Because of the low viscosities of the molten polymer, no solvents are required for blending or other processing, such as extrusion.

[0032] An important advantage of having a binder which is meltable is that the elastomer from an outdated device containing the elastomer can be melted down and reused. At

the time of such remelting, the binder might be reformulated, e.g., by addition of additional fuel or oxidizer particulates. Accordingly, the thermoplastic elastomer provides for its eventual recycle, as opposed to the burning required for disposal of cross-linked compositions. Because the "pot life" of the thermoplastic propellant exceeds that which would reasonably be required of a propellant or explosive formulation, if any problems develop during casting, the process can be delayed as long as is reasonably necessary, merely by maintaining the formulation in a molten state.

[0033] The oxetane homopolymer blocks may be formed according to the cationic polymerization technique taught by Manser in U.S. Patent No. 4,393,199, the complete disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference. The oxirane homopolymer blocks may be formed according to the technique taught in U.S. Patent No. 5,120,827, the complete disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference. The technique employs an adduct of a substance such as a diol, e.g., 1,4-butane diol (BDO), and a catalyst for cationic polymerization, e.g., BF_3 -etherate. This adduct forms with the oxetane monomer an initiating species which undergoes chain extension until n moles of monomer have been incorporated in the molecule, n being the ratio of monomers to adduct present. By adjusting the ratio of monomers to adduct present, the average molecular weight of the polymer which forms may be adjusted. If two or more monomers are present, incorporation of the monomers will be generally random but may depend upon the relative reactivities of the monomers in the polymerization reaction.

[0034] Another suitable catalyst system includes co-catalytically effective quantities of one or more triethoxonium salts and one or more alcohols, as disclosed in U.S. Application No. 08/233,219, the complete disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference to the extent that the disclosure is compatible with this invention. Examples of triethoxonium salts include triethoxonium hexafluorophosphate, triethoxonium hexafluoroantimonate, and triethoxonium tetrafluoroborate.

[0035] It is understood that although the isocyanate-reactive terminal functional groups of the blocks are referred to herein as being hydroxyl groups, the isocyanate-reactive functional groups may also be amines, amides, and/or carboxyl groups.

[0036] The crystalline polyoxetane A blocks and amorphous B blocks, i.e., the respective prepolymers, are each end-capped together or separately with one or more

diisocyanates. The end-capped A and B blocks are mixed together and joined by a linking compound which has a pair of isocyanate-reactive functionalities that are sufficiently unhindered to allow them to react with the free isocyanate moieties of the end-capped copolymers and thereby join the blocks together.

[0037] Oxetane, THF, and oxirane polymer blocks normally have terminal isocyanate-reactive (e.g., hydroxyl) functions which are end-capped with the diisocyanates in accordance with the invention. Preferably, a first one of the isocyanate moieties of the end-capping compound is substantially more reactive with the terminal-hydroxyl moieties of the polymer blocks than the other (e.g., second) isocyanate moiety. One of the problems with linking these types of polymer blocks is that substituted oxetane-derived hydroxyl end groups units have neopentyl structures, whereby the terminal primary hydroxyl moieties are substantially hindered and therefore less reactive. The blocks derived from the oxirane derivatives are secondary alcohols, making their hydroxyl groups less reactive than the primary hydroxyl group of the oxetane-derived A-block. The diisocyanate preferably is selected so that one of the isocyanate groups is capable of reacting with a hydroxyl-group of the polymer blocks while the other isocyanate moiety remains free and unreacted. Diisocyanates are preferably used because isocyanates of higher functionality would result in undesirable levels of cross-linking. The different reactivities of the isocyanate moieties are desirable to ensure that substantial chain extension through linking of like blocks does not occur. Thus, for purposes of this invention, one isocyanate moiety of the diisocyanate should preferably be approximately five times more reactive with terminal hydroxyl groups of oxetane and oxirane blocks than the other group. Preferably one isocyanate moiety is at least about ten times more reactive than the other.

[0038] One diisocyanate which is especially useful for purposes of the invention is 2,4-toluene diisocyanate (TDI) in which the isocyanate moiety in the 4-position is substantially more reactive with hindered terminal hydroxyl moieties than the isocyanate moiety in the 2-position. Isophorone diisocyanate (IPDI) is suitable for some applications, though less so than TDI. Examples of diisocyanates which have not worked well include diphenylmethane diisocyanate (MDI) and hexamethylene diisocyanate (HDI).

[0039] In the end-capping reaction, the diisocyanate is used at an approximately stoichiometric molar amount relative to terminal hydroxyl groups on the polymer chain. Thus, if

the polymer chain has a pair of terminal hydroxyl groups, approximately two molar equivalents, e.g., 1.75-2.2 molar equivalents of diisocyanate are used. In the ideal reaction, all of the more reactive isocyanate moieties would react with terminal hydroxyl groups, leaving all of the less reactive isocyanate moieties free. Practically, not all of the diisocyanate reacts in this manner, and some chain extension does occur. Thus, the end-capping reaction may be maximized for particular polymer chains by some adjustment in the relative molar ratios of polymer block and diisocyanate.

[0040] In one variant embodiment, the A blocks and B blocks are reacted separately with the diisocyanate, so that there is no competition of the blocks for diisocyanate molecules and each separate end-capping reaction may be carried to substantial completion. The diisocyanate may react more rapidly with one block than the other, but this difference can be compensated for by a longer reaction time with the slower reacting block. The reactivity of the terminal hydroxyl groups varies according to steric factors and also according to side-chain moieties. Energetic oxetanes, for example, generally have side-chain moieties that are electron-withdrawing, making their terminal hydroxyl groups less reactive. Once end-capped with diisocyanate, the reactivities of the polymers for linking purposes are essentially dependent only upon the reactivity of the free isocyanate, not on the chemical makeup of the polymer chain itself. Thus end-capped (A) blocks are substantially as reactive as end-capped (B) blocks.

[0041] The end-capping reaction is promoted by a suitable urethane catalyst. A preferred class of catalysts include organic tin compounds with at least one and preferably two labile groups, such as chloride or acetate, bound directly to the tin. Suitable tin catalysts include diphenyl tin dichloride, dibutyl tin dichloride, dibutyl tin dilaurate, dibutyl tin diacetate. Tertiary amine catalysts may also be used.

[0042] The linking compound is one which has two functional groups which are sufficiently unhindered to react with the free isocyanate moieties on the end-capped blocks so as to link A blocks to B blocks, A blocks to A blocks, and B blocks to B blocks in a urethane reaction. Preferred functional groups are hydroxyl groups, although amine, amide, and carboxyl groups, and mixtures thereof also react in a urethane reaction. Primary functional groups are preferred. The linking compound may be a short, straight carbon chain having terminal hydroxyl groups, e.g., 1,4-butanediol, 1,3-propanediol, ethylene glycol, and 1,6-hexanediol. The linking

compound should also be miscible with and rapidly dissolve in the non-halogenated solvent so as to ensure chain extension without unwanted amounts of cross-linking.

[0043] Alternatively, the linking compound may be an oligomer, especially a urethane oligomer, having two functional groups which are sufficiently unhindered to react with the free isocyanate moieties on the end-capped blocks so as to link A blocks to B blocks, A blocks to A blocks, and B blocks to B blocks via a urethane reaction. Preferred functional groups of the oligomer are hydroxyl groups, although amine, amide, and carboxyl groups, and mixtures thereof also react in a urethane reaction. Primary functional groups are preferred.

[0044] An oligomeric glycol containing urethane moieties is preferably used to react the free isocyanate moieties on the end-capped blocks. The oligomeric glycol may be prepared from a mixture of one or more diisocyanates and an excess amount of one or more diols. The diisocyanate(s) and diol(s) selected and the ratio of these reagents may be varied to tailor the properties of the thermoplastic elastomer. The diol-to-diisocyanate molar ratio is preferably selected to be between 5:1 to 5:4, more preferably about 2:1, to maintain acceptable processing temperatures, obtain adequate linking of the isocyanate-capped prepolymers, and improve the thermomechanical properties of the final thermoplastic elastomer. A suitable urethane reaction catalyst promotes the reaction between the diisocyanate(s) and diol(s) to form oligomers. The catalysts discussed above in connection with the linking of the A and B blocks are suitable for this purpose. Representative diols that may be selected for preparing the difunctional oligomer include, by way of example, unbranched aliphatic diols having 2 to 7 carbon atoms, such as ethylene glycol, propylene glycol, butylene glycol; and cycloaliphatic diols such as 1,4-cyclohexanedimethanol, and any combination thereof. Representative diisocyanates for preparing the difunctional oligomer include, by way of example, aliphatic diisocyanates such as hexane diisocyanate, and aryl diisocyanates such as methylene-bis(4-phenyl isocyanate), phenylene diisocyanate, toluene diisocyanate, and xylylene diisocyanate, and any combination thereof. Preferably, the difunctional oligomer has a number average molecular weight M_n of from 350 to 900.

[0045] It is to be appreciated that a wide variety of difunctional compounds may be used to link the end-capped blocks.

[0046] As in the end-capping reaction, some solvent is preferably used, as is a catalyst, such as described above. Conveniently, the reaction mixtures of the A blocks and B blocks may be mixed together without prior separation of the blocks from their respective end-capping reaction mixtures. The linking compound can be added directly to this mixture of A and B blocks. The catalyst is thereby already present when the linking compound is added.

[0047] The linking compound is added in an amount such that the total number of linking-compound functional groups approximately equals the total number of free isocyanate groups of the end-capped polymer blocks. Thus, to provide an $(AB)_n$ polymer with multiple blocks in each chain, the linking compound to polymer block molar ratio is in the range of 0.9-1.1, e.g., 1.0. Accordingly, optimal molar ratios of blocks and linking chemicals may have to be empirically determined.

[0048] The end-capping reaction and linking reaction are carried out in a suitable non-halogenated solvent, e.g., one which dissolves the polymer and does not react with the free isocyanate moieties. Although insubstantial amounts of halogenated solvent may be present, the solution is preferably completely free of any halogenated solvent. The non-halogenated solvent should not react in the urethane reaction and forms an azeotrope with water. Suitable dry solvents include cyclic ethers such as tetrahydrofuran (THF) and 1,4-dioxane; non-cyclic ethers such as ethylene glycol dimethyl ether; ketones such as methyl ethyl ketone ("MEK"); and esters such as ethyl acetate. Of these, THF is preferred because of its excellent solubility characteristics.

[0049] In a preferred embodiment, the solvent forms an azeotrope with water. In this preferred embodiment, after the blocks are dissolved in excess non-halogenated solvent, the solution may be dried by azeotropic distillation of the solvent, and optionally further concentrated, e.g., via distillation, in the solution to increase the volumetric loading and reaction rate. The blocks then may be end-capped, separately or together, and linked in the same or a different non-halogenated solvent. By distilling off excess solvent to remove water, a subsequent reaction with a diisocyanate may proceed without significant interference from competing reactions between the isocyanate moieties and water. Additionally, the solution remains homogeneous and further distillation serves to concentrate the polymer solution, producing higher reaction rates and requiring less reactor capacity. The reaction rates may be

improved by conducting the end-capping reaction at elevated temperatures, such as 30°C to 80°C, more preferably 40°C to 60°C. The process may be conducted by a batch or continuous method. For example, the prepolymer and catalyst solution may be continuously fed through a mixer/extruder into which is injected a diisocyanate and a diol at appropriate rates and positions so that urethane linking occurs within the extruder and energetic thermoplastic elastomer is continuously produced for processing.

[0050] In the end-capping and block linking steps, the reaction can be followed with NMR and IR. With NMR, the urethane-forming reaction can be followed through the methylene groups on the polymer adjacent to the terminal hydroxyl groups. With IR, the change from isocyanate to urethane can be directly followed.

[0051] Synthesis of polyoxetanes is described in U.S. Patent Nos. 4,483,978 and 4,806,613, the complete disclosures of which are incorporated herein by reference to the extent that these disclosures are compatible with the present invention.

[0052] The invention will now be described in greater detail by way of the following examples, which are not to be construed as exhaustive as to the scope of this invention.

[0053] As referred to herein, "dry" means that less than 1 wt% water was present.

[0054] For the following experiments, poly(azidomethyloxirane) was supplied by 3M Specialty Chemicals of St. Paul, MN (Lot L-12564). Unless otherwise specified, all other materials were obtained from Aldrich of Milwaukee, WI.

EXAMPLE 1 (poly(3,3-bis(azidomethyl)oxetane))

[0055] A 5 liter jacketed flask equipped with a mechanical stirrer was charged with 600 grams of tribromoneopentylalcohol (AmeriBrom, Inc. of New York), 1200 ml of toluene, and 6 grams of tetrabutylammonium bromide. The mixture was cooled to 12°C and 193 grams of sodium hydroxide was added dropwise as a 40 wt% solution keeping the temperature at 12°C. After 36 hours the reaction mixture was washed with water until the pH was less than 9 to obtain the crude product which was distilled to obtain 3,3-bis(bromomethyl)oxetane at 65% yield.

[0056] A 5 liter jacketed flask equipped with a mechanical stirrer was charged with 1450 grams of the 3,3-bis(bromomethyl)oxetane and 1720 ml of toluene. The mixture was stirred and heated to 60°C before 1600 ml of water, 14.7 grams of tetrabutylammonium bromide,

and 862 grams of sodium azide were added. After 24 hours, the reaction mixture was cooled to room temperature and washed three times with 2000 ml of water. The toluene and water were removed from the organic layer by distillation to give pure 3,3-bis(azidomethyl)oxetane at 85% yield.

[0057] Under an argon atmosphere, 14.94 grams of butane diol was added to a flame dried 5 liter round-bottomed flask charged with 1340 ml of dry methylene chloride. To this mixture, 11.77 grams of borontrifluoride-etherate was added and the reaction was allowed to proceed for one hour at room temperature. The reactor was then cooled to -10°C and 937.78 grams of the 3,3-bis(azidomethyl)oxetane was added. The solution was allowed to come to room temperature and left to react for three days. The reaction was then quenched by the addition of 50 ml of saturated brine solution. The organic phase was separated off and washed with 100 ml of 10 wt% sodium bicarbonate solution before the solvent was removed on a rotovapor. The resulting liquid was then poured into 5 liters of methanol to precipitate the polymer, which was filtered from the solution and dried under vacuum at 30°C.

EXAMPLE 2 (poly(3-azidomethyl-3-methyloxetane))

[0058] A 5 liter jacketed flask equipped with a mechanical stirrer was charged with 1062 grams of sodium azide, 1972 ml of water, and 2450 grams of 3-bromomethyl-3-methyloxetane (supplied by AmeriBrom, Inc. of New York). This mixture was brought to reflux with vigorous mixing. After 48 hours the mixture was cooled to room temperature. The organic layer was separated off and washed three times with 1000 ml of water before being dried over molecular sieves to yield pure 3-azidomethyl-3-methyloxetane at 85% yield.

[0059] Under an argon atmosphere, 14.94 grams of butane diol was added to a flame dried 5 liter round-bottomed flask charged with 1.340 ml of dry methylene chloride. To this mixture, 11.77 grams of borontrifluoride-etherate was added and the reaction was allowed to proceed for one hour at room temperature. The reactor was then cooled to -10°C and 937.78 grams of the 3-azidomethyl-3-methyloxetane was added. The solution was allowed to come to room temperature and left to react for three days. The reaction was then quenched by the addition of 50 ml of saturated brine solution. The organic phase was separated off and washed with 100 ml of 10 wt% sodium bicarbonate solution before the solvent was removed on a

rotovapor. The resulting liquid was then poured into 5 liters of methanol to precipitate the polymer, which was filtered from the solution and dried under vacuum at 30°C.

EXAMPLE 3 (Random block copolymer of poly(3-azidomethyl-3-methyloxetane) and poly(3,3-bis(azidomethyl)oxetane) in THF)

[0060] In a one liter round bottom flask, 65 grams of dry difunctional poly(3-azidomethyl-3-methyloxetane) with a hydroxyl equivalent weight of 3121 and 35 grams of dry poly(3,3-bis(azidomethyl)oxetane) with a hydroxyl equivalent weight of 3235 were dissolved in 650 grams of dry tetrahydrofuran. The solution was concentrated and dried by evaporation of the tetrahydrofuran under reduced pressure via a rotovapor until 100 grams of the solvent remained. To this solution, 0.1 grams of diphenyltin dichloride and 5.41 grams of toluene-2,4-diisocyanate were added while stirring with a magnetic stirrer at ambient temperature and pressure. After 24 hours, 1.40 grams of butane-1,4-diol was added causing the solution to become steadily more viscous. After another 24 hours, the solution was poured into methanol in a volume ratio of 1:5. The methanol was decanted off, and the precipitated polymer was washed three times with fresh methanol (1:5 volume ratio) to give a rubbery granular product with the properties set forth below:

Mn = 20480

Mw = 120800

Mw/Mn = 5.9

E^{1.0} (psi) = 754

ε_m (%) = 204

ε_f (failure) (%) = 229

σ_m (psi) = 180

σ_m (corrected) (psi) = 558

ShoreA = 64

EXAMPLE 4 (Random block copolymer of poly(3-azidomethyl-3-methyloxetane) and poly(3,3-bis(azidomethyl)oxetane) in THF)

[0061] In a 100 ml round bottom flask, 6.5 grams of dry difunctional poly(3-azidomethyl-3-methyloxetane) with a hydroxyl equivalent weight of 3040 and 3.5 grams of dry poly(3,3-bis(azidomethyl)oxetane) with a hydroxyl equivalent weight of 3235 were dissolved in 60 ml of dry tetrahydrofuran. The solution was concentrated and dried by evaporation of the tetrahydrofuran under reduced pressure via a rotovapor until 10 grams of the solvent remained. To this solution, 0.25 ml of dibutyltin dilaurate and 0.561 grams of toluene-2,4-diisocyanate were added while stirring with a magnetic stirrer at ambient temperature and pressure. After 15 minutes, 0.145 grams of butane-1,4-diol was added causing the solution to become steadily more viscous. After another 30 minutes, the solution was poured into methanol in a volume ratio of 1:5. The methanol was decanted off, and the precipitated polymer was washed three times with fresh methanol (1:5 volume ratio) to give a rubbery granular product with the properties set forth below:

Mn = 15404

Mw = 67277

Mw/Mn = 4.37

EXAMPLE 5 (Random block copolymer of poly(3-azidomethyl-3-methyloxetane) and poly(3,3-bis(azidomethyl)oxetane) in 1,4-dioxane)

[0062] In a 100 ml round bottom flask, 6.5 grams of dry difunctional poly(3-azidomethyl-3-methyloxetane) with a hydroxyl equivalent weight of 3040 and 3.5 grams of dry poly(3,3-bis(azidomethyl)oxetane) with a hydroxyl equivalent weight of 3235 were dissolved in 60 ml of dry 1,4-dioxane. The solution was concentrated and dried by evaporation of the 1,4-dioxane under reduced pressure via a rotovapor until 12 grams of the solvent remained. To this solution, 0.3 ml of dibutyltin dilaurate and 0.561 grams of toluene-2,4-diisocyanate were added while stirring with a magnetic stirrer at ambient temperature and pressure. After one hour, 0.145 grams of butane-1,4-diol was added causing the solution to become steadily more viscous. After another two hours, the solution was poured into methanol in a volume ratio of 1:5. The methanol was decanted off, and the precipitated polymer

was washed three times with fresh methanol (1:5 volume ratio) to give a rubbery granular product with the properties set forth below:

Mn = 21230

Mw = 116272

Mw/Mn = 5.48

EXAMPLE 6 (Random block copolymer of poly(3-azidomethyl-3-methyloxetane) and poly(3,3-bis(azidomethyl)oxetane) in ethyl acetate)

[0063] In a 500 ml round bottom flask, 18 grams of dry difunctional poly(3-azidomethyl-3-methyloxetane) with a hydroxyl equivalent weight of 3356 and 6 grams of dry poly(3,3-bis(azidomethyl)oxetane) with a hydroxyl equivalent weight of 3235 were dissolved in 200 ml of dry ethyl acetate. The solution was concentrated and dried by evaporation of the ethyl acetate under reduced pressure via a rotovapor until 34 grams of the solvent remained. To this solution at 40°C, 0.024 grams of diphenyltin dichloride and 1.26 grams of toluene-2,4-diisocyanate were added while stirring with a magnetic stirrer. After one hour, 0.33 grams of butane-1,4-diol was added causing the solution to become steadily more viscous. After another 48 hours, the solution was poured into methanol in a volume ratio of 1:5. The methanol was decanted off, and the precipitated polymer was washed three times with fresh methanol (1:5 volume ratio) to give a rubbery granular product with the properties set forth below:

Mn = 13880

Mw = 43310

Mw/Mn = 3.12

EXAMPLE 7 (Random block copolymer of poly(3-azidomethyl-3-methyloxetane) and poly(3,3-bis(azidomethyl)oxetane) in THF)

[0064] In a 100 ml round bottom flask, 6.5 grams of dry difunctional poly(3-azidomethyl-3-methyloxetane) with a hydroxyl equivalent weight of 3040 and 3.5 grams of dry poly(3,3-bis(azidomethyl)oxetane) with a hydroxyl equivalent weight of 3235 were dissolved in 70 ml of dry tetrahydrofuran. The solution was concentrated and dried by evaporation of the tetrahydrofuran under reduced pressure via a rotovapor at 50°C until 5 grams

of the solvent remained. To this solution at 50°C, 0.5 ml of dibutyltin dilaurate and 0.561 grams of toluene-2,4-diisocyanate were added while stirring with a magnetic stirrer. After three minutes, 0.145 grams of butane-1,4-diol was added causing the solution to become steadily more viscous. After another five minutes, the solution was diluted with 20 ml of tetrahydrofuran and 1 ml of methanol. This solution was then precipitated in methanol in a volume ratio of 1:5. The methanol was decanted off, and the precipitated polymer was washed three times with fresh methanol (1:5 volume ratio) to give a rubbery granular product with the properties set forth below:

Mn = 17350

Mw = 103231

Mw/Mn = 5.95

EXAMPLE 8 (Random block copolymer of poly(azidomethyloxirane) and poly(3,3-bis(azidomethyl)oxetane))

[0065] In a 25 ml round bottom flask, a urethane oligomer was prepared by dissolving 1.55 grams of toluene-2,4-diisocyanate in 4 ml tetrahydrofuran and adding to the solution 0.1 ml of dibutyltin dilaurate followed by 1.60 grains of butane-1,4-diol. This reaction mixture was stirred for 1 hour at room temperature.

[0066] In a separate 250 ml round bottom flask, 17.94 grams of dry difunctional poly(azidomethyloxirane) with a hydroxyl equivalent weight of 1174 and 6.63 grams of dry poly(3,3-bis(azidomethyl)oxetane) with a hydroxyl equivalent weight of 2390 were dissolved in 100 ml of dry tetrahydrofuran. The solution was concentrated and dried by evaporation of the tetrahydrofuran under reduced pressure via a rotovapor until 20 grams of the solvent remained. To this solution, 75 ml of dibutyltin dilaurate and 3.097 grams of toluene-2,4-diisocyanate were added while stirring with a magnetic stirrer at ambient temperature and pressure. After one hour, the urethane oligomer was added to this solution, causing the solution to become steadily more viscous. After 20 minutes, the solution was too viscous to stir and was diluted with 20 ml of dry tetrahydrofuran and allowed to react for an additional 20 minutes before being poured into methanol in a volume ratio of 1:5. The methanol was decanted off, and the precipitated polymer

was washed three times with fresh methanol (1:5 volume ratio) to give a rubbery granular product with the properties shown in FIGS. 1 and 2 and set forth below:

Mn = 26240

Mw = 175500

Mw/Mn = 6.69

[0067] Molecular weight distribution was determined by gel permeation chromatography using polystyrene standards, with the results shown in FIG. 1. The GPC trace in FIG. 1 demonstrates that the prepolymers were linked to produce a copolymer having a higher molecular weight and dispersivity than the homopolymer blocks. The DMA trace in FIG. 2 shows the melt transition of random block (BAMO-GAP)_n at 75-80°C with a material modulus reducing only slowly before this point.

EXAMPLES 9-11 (Random block copolymer of poly(3-azidomethyl-3-methyloxetane) and poly(3,3-bis(azidomethyl)oxetane) linked with a urethane oligomer)

[0068] In a 500 ml round bottom flask, 45 grams of difunctional poly(3-azidomethyl-3-methyloxetane) with a hydroxyl equivalent weight of 3125 and 15 grams of poly(3,3-bis(azidomethyl)oxetane) with a hydroxyl equivalent weight of 3152 were dissolved in 300 ml of tetrahydrofuran. The solution was concentrated and dried by evaporation of the tetrahydrofuran or a rotovapor until a solution with 90 grams of solvent remained. To this solution 0.6 grams of dibutyltin dichloride and 3.34 grams of toluene-2,4-diisocyanate was added, and the mixture was allowed to react for 3 hours to end-cap the prepolymer.

[0069] For Example 9, 0.22 grams of butanediol was added to one quarter of the isocyanate end-capped prepolymer mixture. The reaction was allowed to continue for 14 hours before it was precipitated with methanol in a volume ratio of 1:5. The methanol was decanted off, and the precipitated polymer was washed three times with fresh methanol (1:5 volume ratio) to give a rubbery granular product.

[0070] For Example 10, a urethane oligomer was derived from a mixture of 2 ml of tetrahydrofuran, 0.42 grams of toluene-2,4-diisocyanate, 0.43 grams of butane-1,4-diol, and 0.1 grams of dibutyltin dichloride, which were allowed to react for one hour. The urethane oligomer was then added to one quarter of the isocyanate end-capped prepolymer mixture and allowed to

react for 14 hours before it was precipitated with methanol in a volume ratio of 1:5. The methanol was decanted off, and the precipitated polymer was washed three times with fresh methanol (1:5 volume ratio) to give a rubbery granular product.

[0071] For Example 11, a urethane oligomer was derived from a mixture of 2 ml of tetrahydrofuran, 0.83 grams of toluene-2,4-diisocyanate, 0.65 grams of butane-1,4-diol, and 0.1 grams of dibutyltin dichloride, which were allowed to react for one hour. The urethane oligomer was then added to one quarter of the isocyanate end-capped prepolymer mixture and allowed to react for 14 hours before it was precipitated with methanol in a volume ratio of 1:5. The methanol was decanted off, and the precipitated polymer was washed three times with fresh methanol (1:5 volume ratio) to give a rubbery granular product.

TABLE

	Example 9	Example 10	Example 11
diol:diisocyanate molar ratio	1:0	2:1	3:2
Mn	11440	12340	13240
Mw	134800	142000	122600
Mw/Mn	11.78	11.51	9.26
E ^{1.0}	520	669	823
ε _m (%)	311	897	536
ε _f (failure) (%)	372	1082	562
σ _m (psi)	153	345	300
σ _m (corrected) (psi)	678	3575	2381
ShoreA	49	60	65

[0072] The foregoing detailed description of the preferred embodiments of the invention has been provided for the purpose of explaining the principles of the invention and its practical application, thereby enabling others skilled in the art to understand the invention for various embodiments and with various modifications as are suited to the particular use contemplated. The foregoing detailed description is not intended to be exhaustive or to limit the invention to the precise embodiments disclosed. Modifications and equivalents will be apparent to practitioners skilled in this art and are encompassed within the spirit and scope of the appended claims.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

A method is provided for preparing thermoplastic elastomers. A blocks of the thermoplastic elastomers are crystalline at temperatures below about 60°C and are derived from oxetane derivatives and/or tetrahydrofuran derivatives. B blocks of the thermoplastic elastomer are amorphous above about -20°C and are derived from oxetanes, tetrahydrofuran, oxiranes, and derivatives thereof. According to this method, the A and B blocks are dissolved into solution containing a non-halogenated solvent, preferably tetrahydrofuran, then dried by azeotropic distillation. The dried blocks are end-capped with a diisocyanate, preferably a diisocyanate having one isocyanate moiety substantially more reactive with the terminal groups of the blocks than the other isocyanate moiety of the diisocyanate. The end-capped blocks are then linked together with a linking compound.

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APPLICATION FOR LETTERS PATENT

for

**METHOD FOR THE SYNTHESIS OF ENERGETIC THERMOPLASTIC
ELASTOMERS IN NON-HALOGENATED SOLVENTS**

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METHOD FOR THE SYNTHESIS OF ENERGETIC THERMOPLASTIC ELASTOMERS IN NON-HALOGENATED SOLVENTS

[0001] This is a national stage application under 37 U.S.C. § 371 of PCT/US99/24013 filed on November 9, 1999.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

[0002] This invention relates to a method of synthesizing energetic thermoplastic elastomers which are useful as binders of high energy compositions, such as rocket motor propellants, gun propellants, explosive munitions, gas generators of vehicle supplemental restraint systems, or the like.

2. Description of the Related Art

[0003] Solid high energy compositions, such as propellants, explosives, gas generators, and the like comprise solid particulates, such as fuel particulates and/or oxidizer particulates, dispersed and immobilized throughout a polymeric binder matrix.

[0004] Conventional solid composite propellant binders utilize cross-linked elastomers in which prepolymers are cross-linked by chemical curing agents. As outlined in detail in U.S. Patent No. 4,361,526, there are important disadvantages to using cross-linked elastomers as binders. Cross-linked elastomers must be cast within a short period of time after addition of the curative, which time period is known as the “pot life”. life. Disposal of a cast, cross-linked propellant composition is difficult, and usually is accomplished by burning, which poses environmental problems. Furthermore, current state-of-the-art propellant compositions have serious problems that include their use of nonenergetic binders which have lower performance and high end-of-mix viscosities.

[0005] In view of the inherent disadvantages associated with the use of cross-linked elastomeric polymers as binder materials, there has been considerable interest in developing thermoplastic elastomers suitable as binders for solid, high energy compositions. However,

many thermoplastic elastomers fail to meet important requirements expected of propellant formulations, particularly the requirement of being processible below about 120°C, it being desirable that a thermoplastic elastomeric polymer for use as a binder in a high energy system have a melting temperature of between about 60°C and about 120°C. The melting temperature is desirably at least about 60°C because the propellant composition may be subject to somewhat elevated temperatures during storage and transport, and significant softening of the propellant composition at such elevated temperatures is unwanted. The setting of the melting temperature at not more than about 120°C is determined by the instability, at elevated temperatures, of many components which ordinarily go into high energy compositions, particularly oxidizer particulates and energetic plasticizers. Many thermoplastic elastomers exhibit high melt viscosities which preclude high solids loading and many show considerable creep and/or shrinkage after processing. Thermoplastic elastomers typically obtain their thermoplastic properties from segments that form glassy domains which may contribute to physical properties adverse to their use as binders. ~~Crosslinkable~~ Cross-linkable thermoplastic elastomers are block copolymers with the property of forming physical cross-links at predetermined temperatures. One thermoplastic elastomer, e.g., Kraton, brand TPE, obtains this property by having the glass transition point of one component block above room temperature. At temperatures below 109°C, the glassy blocks of Kraton form glassy domains and thus physically cross-link the amorphous segments. The strength of these elastomers depends upon the degree of phase separation. Thus, it remains desirable to have controlled, but significant, immiscibility between the two types of blocks, which is a function of their chemical structure and molecular weight. On the other hand, as the blocks become more immiscible, the melt viscosity increases, thus having a deleterious effect on the processibility of the material.

[0006] ~~Above-mentioned~~ The above-mentioned U.S. Patent No. 4,361,526 proposes a thermoplastic elastomeric binder which is a block copolymer of a diene and styrene, the styrene blocks providing a meltable crystal structure and the diene blocks imparting rubbery or elastomeric properties to the copolymer. The '526 patent states that this polymer is processed with a ~~volatile~~ volatile organic solvent. Solvent processing is undesirable inasmuch as the dissolved composition cannot be cast in a conventional manner, e.g., into a rocket motor casing.

Furthermore, solvent-based processing presents problems with respect to removal and recovery of solvent.

[0007] The preparation of energetic thermoplastic elastomers prepared from polyoxetane block copolymers has been proposed in U.S. Patent No. 4,483,978 to Manser and U.S. Patent No. 4,806,613 to Wardle (“the ‘613 patent”), the complete disclosures of which are incorporated herein by reference to the extent that these disclosures are compatible with this invention. According to the latter, these materials overcome the disadvantages associated with conventional cross-linked elastomers such as limited pot-life, high end-of-mix viscosity, and scrap disposal problems.

[0008] The thermoplastic materials proposed by the ‘613 patent involve elastomers having both (A) and (B) blocks, each derived from cyclic ethers, such as oxetane and oxetane derivatives and tetrahydrofuran (THP) and tetrahydrofuran derivatives. The monomer or combination of monomers of the (A) blocks are selected for providing a crystalline structure at usual ambient temperatures, such as below about 60°C, whereas the monomer or combination of monomers of the (B) blocks are selected to ensure an amorphous structure at usual ambient temperatures, such as above about -20°C. Typical of these materials is the random block copolymer (poly(3-azidomethyl-3-methyloxetane)-poly(3,3-bis(azidomethyl)oxetane), also known as poly(AMMO/BAMO). These block copolymers have good energetic and mechanical properties. Additionally, the block copolymers can be processed without solvents to serve as binders in high performance, reduced vulnerability explosive, propellant, and gas generant formulations. Advantageously, the block copolymers exhibit good compatibility with most materials used in such energetic formulations.

[0009] However, the processing techniques disclosed in the ‘978 and ‘613 patents involve the use of halogenated solvents, such as methylene chloride. Several drawbacks have been associated with the use of the halogenated solvents disclosed in the ‘978 and ‘613 patents. One drawback is the detrimental impact that halogenated solvents have on the environment. Another drawback of halogenated solvents is attributable to the additional drying steps which the pre-polymer block blocks are subject to after ~~the~~ their formation. The pre-polymer blocks are typically dried either with chemical drying agent, e.g., desiccants followed by filtration or by the azeotropic removal of water. The azeotropic removal of water is performed with toluene, which

is different from the solvent selected for linking the pre-polymer blocks. The performance of an additional drying step and the use of different solvents in the azeotropic drying step and the linking step ~~complicates~~ complicate processing and ~~increases~~ increase overall processing time. Moreover, toluene does not completely dissolve the end-capped blocks prior to the linking reaction and can interfere with the end-capping and linking catalysts. Yet another drawback associated with halogenated solvents is the relatively low concentrations of pre-polymer blocks and linking compounds that may be loaded in halogenated solvents for processing. The loading of the thermoplastic elastomer ingredients is limited by the solubility of the ingredients in the solvent. For example, the currently used process for forming thermoplastic elastomers by linking energetic polyether diols and diisocyanates typically use approximately 30-40% by weight solutions of the reactants in dichloromethane and 0.1% by weight tin catalyst. Additionally, completion of the reaction in halogenated solvents typically takes several days to a week.

[0010] United States Patent No. 4,393,199 to Manser describes the use of a non-halogenated solvent, nitromethane, during cationic polymerization of cyclic ethers. However, it has been found that cyclic ether pre-polymer blocks are not sufficiently soluble in nitromethane to adequately link the pre-polymer blocks once they are formed.

[0011] It would therefore be a significant advancement in the art to provide a synthesis route to making energetic thermoplastic elastomer binders which avoids the drawbacks associated with halogenated solvents while reducing processing time and increasing productivity.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0012] It is, therefore, an object of this invention to provide a method for the synthesis of energetic thermoplastic elastomers that addresses the aforementioned problems associated with the related art and realizes the advancement expressed above.

[0013] In accordance with the principles of this invention, these and other objects are attained by a method of synthesizing an energetic thermoplastic elastomer binder that is in a solid state at room temperature and is derived from A blocks which are crystalline at temperatures below about 60°C and B blocks which are amorphous at temperatures above about -20°C. The A blocks may include one or more polyethers derived from monomers of oxetane

derivatives and/or tetrahydrofuran derivatives. The B blocks may include one or more polyethers derived from monomers of oxetane and its derivatives, tetrahydrofuran and its derivatives, and/or oxirane and its derivatives. The polyoxetane blocks A and polyoxirane blocks B may be linked by end-capping the blocks with diisocyanates and linking the end-capped blocks with difunctional linking chemicals in which each of the two terminal functional groups are reactive with an isocyanate moiety of the diisocyanate.

[0014] In accordance with one embodiment of this method, the A and B blocks are dissolved into solution comprising one or more non-halogenated solvents. The solvent or solvents selected preferably are capable of dissolving more than 25% by weight of the blocks (based on total weight of the solvents and blocks) into solution, more preferably at least 35% by weight into solution, and still more preferably 50% by weight into solution. The solvents preferably do not interfere with the end capping catalyst, such as dibutyl tin dilaurate. Representative solvents include ethers, esters, and ketones. Tetrahydrofuran is the preferred solvent because of its excellent solubility. The A and B blocks are mixed together at approximately the stoichiometric ratios that the blocks are intended to be present in the energetic thermoplastic elastomer. The solution is then dried by azeotropic removal of water with excess solvent. The A and B blocks are end-capped in the solvent with one or more diisocyanates. The end-capping may be performed prior or subsequent to the mixing step, but subsequent to the drying step. The diisocyanate preferably has one isocyanate moiety which is more reactive, preferably at least about five times ~~as reactive~~, more reactive with the terminal hydroxyl group of each of the blocks than the other isocyanate moiety, whereby the more reactive isocyanate moiety tends to react with the terminal-hydroxyl groups of the blocks, leaving the less reactive isocyanate moiety free and unreactive. The mixture is reacted with a chain extender having two ~~isocyanate reactive~~ isocyanate-reactive groups that are sufficiently unhindered to react with the free and unreacted isocyanate groups of the end-capped blocks. In this manner, the end-capped blocks are linked, but not ~~crosslinked~~, cross-linked, to form a thermoplastic elastomer.

[0015] It is still a further object of this invention to provide a method for making propellants, especially rocket propellants and gun propellants, explosives, gas generants, or the like containing an energetic thermoplastic elastomer binder by procedures including the above-discussed method.

[0016] These and other objects, features, and advantages of the present invention will become apparent from the accompanying drawings and following detailed description which illustrate and explain, by way of example, the principles of this invention.

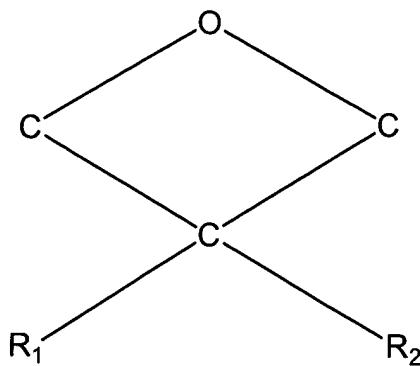
BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0017] The accompanying drawings are provided to facilitate an understanding of the principles of this invention. In such drawings, FIGS. 1 and 2 are graphs showing the properties of a thermoplastic elastomer prepared in accordance with an embodiment of this invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0018] The thermoplastic elastomer $(AB)_n$ polymers of this invention include A blocks which are crystalline at temperatures below about 60°C, preferably at temperatures below about 75°C, and B blocks which are amorphous at temperatures down to about -20°C. Each of the A and B blocks are polyethers derived from cyclic ethers. Specifically, the A blocks are derived from monomers of oxetane derivatives and/or THF derivatives. The B blocks are derived from monomers of oxetane and its derivatives, THF and its derivatives, and/or monomers of oxirane and its derivatives, preferably energetic oxirane derivatives. The polymers melt at temperatures between about 60°C and about 120°C, and more preferably between about 75°C and about 100°C. The A and B blocks are mutually miscible in the melt. Consequently, the melt viscosity of the block copolymer decreases rapidly as the temperature is raised above the melting point, whereby high energy formulations may include high solids content, e.g., up to about 95% by weight of solid particulates, and can be easily processed. The invention also includes other thermoplastic elastomer block structures, such as ABA tri-block polymers and A_nB star polymers. Contributing to the miscibility of the A and B blocks is their similar chemical structure.

[0019] Oxetane monomer units that may be used in forming the A and B blocks of the present invention have the general formula:

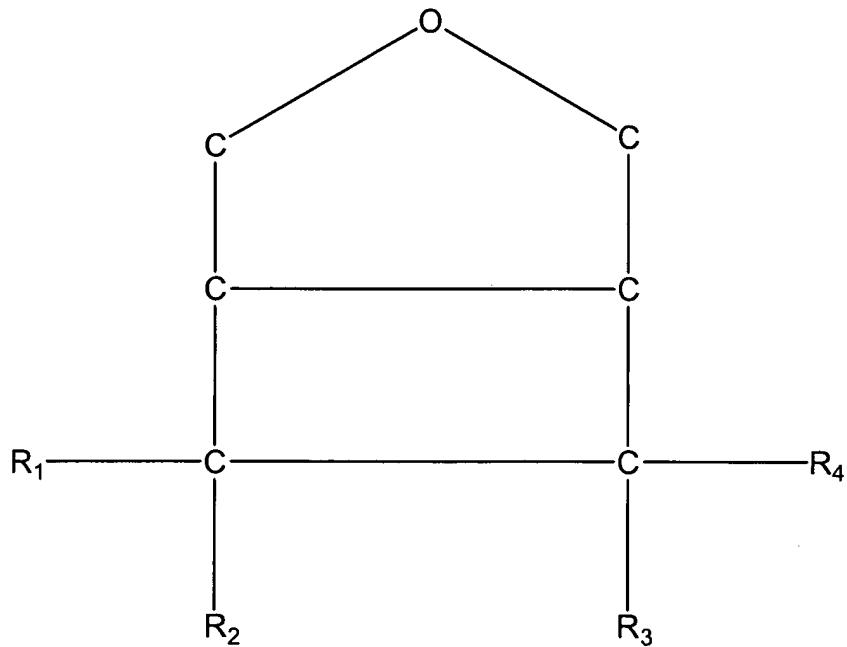


wherein the R₁ and R₂ groups are the same or different and are selected from moieties having the general formula: -(CH₂)_nX, where n is 0-10 and X is selected from the group consisting of -H, -NO₂, -CN, -Cl, -F, -O-alkyl, -OH, -I, -ONO₂, -N(NO₂)-alkyl, -C≡CH, -Br, -CH=CH(H or alkyl), -CO₂(H or alkyl), -N(H or alkyl)₂, -O-(CH₂)₁₋₅-O-(CH₂)₀₋₈-CH₃, and N₃.

[0020] Examples of oxetane derivatives that may be used in forming the A blocks in accordance with this invention are generally symmetrically substituted symmetrically substituted oxetanes including, but are not not limited to, the following: BEMO (3,3-(bis(ethoxymethyl)oxetane), BCMO (3,3-bis(chloromethyl)oxetane), BMMO (3,3-bis(methoxymethyl)oxetane), BFMO (3,3-bis(fluoromethyl)oxetane), BAOMO (3,3-bis(acetoxymethyl)oxetane), BHMO (3,3-bis(hydroxymethyl)oxetane), BMEMO (3,3-bis(methoxyethoxymethyl)oxetane), BIMO (3,3-bis(iodomethyl)oxetane), BNMO (3,3-bis(nitratomethyl)oxetane), BMNAMO (3,3-bis(methylnitraminomethyl)oxetane), and BAMO (3,3-bis(azidomethyl)oxetane).

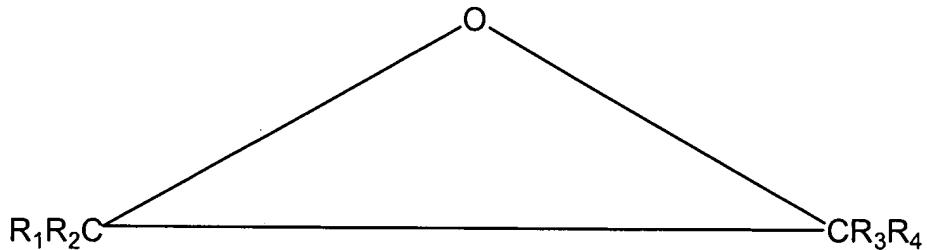
[0021] Examples of oxetanes oxetane derivatives that may be used in forming the B blocks in accordance with this invention are generally unsymmetrically substituted unsymmetrically substituted oxetanes including, but are not not limited to, the following: HMMO (3-hydroxymethyl-3-methyloxetane), OMMO (3-octoxymethyl-3-methyloxetane), CMMO (3-chloromethyl-3-methyloxetane), AMMO (3-azidomethyl-3-methyloxetane), IMMO (3-iodomethyl-3-methyloxetane), PMMO (3-propynomethylmethyloxetane), NMMO (3-nitratomethyl-3-methyloxetane), and MNAMMO (3-methylnitraminomethyl-3-methyloxetane).

[0022] Tetrahydrofuran monomer units that may be used in forming the blocks of the present invention have the general formula:



wherein the R₁-R₄ groups are the same or different and are selected from moieties set forth above in connection with the description of suitable oxetane derivatives.

[0023] Oxirane monomer units used in forming the B blocks of the present invention have the general formula:



wherein R₁ and R₃ are independently selected from hydrogen and methyl, and R₂ and R₄ are independently selected from hydrogen, alkyl containing from 1 to 10 carbon atoms, chloroalkyl and bromoalkyl containing 1 to 2 carbon atoms, and nitratoalkyl, nitratoalkoxyalkyl, nitroalkyl,

nitroalkoxyalkyl, azidoalkyl, azidoalkoxyalkyl, fluoronitroalkyl, and fluoronitroalkyoxalkyl containing 1 to 5 carbon atoms provided that at least one of R₁ to R₄ is not hydrogen.

[0024] Examples of energetic oxiranes that may be used in forming the B blocks in accordance with this invention include, but are not limited ~~to~~ to, glycidyl azide polymers (C₃H₅N₃O) (GAP), especially difunctional GAP, and poly(glycidyl nitrate) (C₃H₅NO₄) (PGN). These polymers have a glass transition temperature below about -20°C and are amorphous at temperatures above -20°C.

[0025] Forming thermoplastic elastomers in accordance with the invention involves (1) formation of at least one polyether-derived homopolymer, copolymer, or terpolymer serving as the A blocks and crystalline in nature with a relatively elevated melting point, i.e., between about 60°C and about 120°C, preferably near 80°C and (2) formation of at least one polyether-derived homopolymer, copolymer, or terpolymer serving as the B blocks and amorphous in structure with a glass transition temperature (T_g) below about -20°C.

[0026] The selection of the A block may be made based on the properties desired for the intended application of the thermoplastic elastomer. Examples of preferred crystalline A blocks include blocks possessing high energy density, such as those formed from BAMO and/or BMNAMO monomers. Melting temperature and ether oxygen content are additional factors that may be taken into consideration in selecting the monomers.

[0027] The properties of the block polymer ~~depends~~ depend upon the molecular weights of the individual blocks and the total molecular weights. Typically the A blocks have number average molecular weights ranging from about 3000 to about 8000, whereas the B blocks have number average molecular weights ranging from about 3000 to about 15,000. The weight ratio of A blocks to B blocks is preferably between about 15:85 to about 40:60. The preferred sizes of the A and B blocks for any particular binder application may be empirically determined.

[0028] The thermoplastic elastomers of this invention preferably are in a solid state at room temperature, have a weight average molecular weight of at least 40,000, more preferably at least 60,000, still more preferably at least 80,000, and a number average molecular weight of at least 10,000, more preferably at least 12,000, still more preferably at least 15,000.

[0029] Thermoplastic elastomers produced in accordance with the present invention may be admixed with other components of a high energy formulation, such as a propellant formulation. The binder system, in addition to the thermoplastic elastomers, may optionally contain one or more plasticizers for improving the resistance of the thermoplastic elastomer to hardening at low temperatures, which may be included at a plasticizer-to-thermoplastic elastomer weight ratio of up to about 1:1. Suitable high energy plasticizers include glycidyl azide polymer (GAP), nitroglycerine, butanetriol trinitrate (BTTN), alkyl nitratomethyl nitramines, trimethylolethane trinitrate (TMETN), diethylene glycol dinitrate, triethylene glycol dinitrate (TEGDN), bis(dinitropropylacetal/-bis(dinitropropyl)formal (BDNPA/F), and mixtures thereof. Inert plasticizers can also be used. Representative inert plasticizers include, by way of example, dioctyladipate (DOA), isodecylperlargonate (IDP), dioctylphthalate (DOP), dioctylmaleate (DOM), dibutylphthalate (DBP), oleyl nitrile, triacetin, and combinations thereof. The binder system may also contain a minor amount of a wetting agent or lubricant that enables higher solids loading.

[0030] The solids content of the high energy composition generally ranges from about 50 wt% to about 95 wt%, higher solids loading generally being preferred so long as such loading is consistent with structural integrity. The solids include fuel material particles and powders (collectively referred to herein as particulates), such as particulate aluminum, and/or oxidizer particulates. Representative fuels include aluminum, magnesium, boron, and beryllium. Representative oxidizers and co-oxidizers include ammonium perchlorate; hydroxylammonium nitrate (HAN); ammonium dinitramide (ADN); hydrazinium nitroformate; ammonium nitrate; nitramines such as cyclotetramethylene tetranitramine (HMX) and cyclotrimethylene trinitramine (RDX), 2,4,6,8,10, 12-hexanitro-2,4,6,8,10,12-hexaazatetracyclo[5.5.0.0^{5,9}.0^{3,11}]-dodecane or 2,4,6,8,10,12-hexanitrohexaazaisowurtzitane (CL-20 or HNIW), and/or 4,10-dinitro-2,6,8,12-tetraoxa-4,10-diazatetracyclo[5.5.0.0^{5,9}.0^{3,11}]dodecane (TEX), and any combination thereof. In addition, the high energy composition may include minor amounts of additional components known in the art, such as bonding agents, burn rate modifiers, ballistic modifiers (e.g., lead), etc.

[0031] The thermoplastic elastomer may be mixed with the solids and other components of high energy formulation at temperatures above its melting temperature. Blending

may be done in conventional mixing apparatus. Because of the low viscosities of the molten polymer, no solvents are required for blending or other processing, such as extrusion.

[0032] An important advantage of having a binder which is meltable is that the elastomer from an outdated device containing the elastomer can be melted down and reused. At the time of such remelting, the binder might be reformulated, e.g., by addition of additional fuel or oxidizer particulates. Accordingly, the thermoplastic elastomer provides for its eventual recycle, as opposed to the burning required for disposal of cross-linked compositions. Because the "pot life" of the thermoplastic propellant exceeds that which would reasonably be required of a propellant or explosive formulation, if any problems develop during casting, the process can be delayed as long as is reasonably necessary, merely by maintaining the formulation in a molten state.

[0033] The oxetane homopolymer blocks may be formed according to the cationic polymerization technique taught by Manser in U.S. Patent No. 4,393,199, the complete disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference. The oxirane homopolymer blocks may be formed according to the technique taught in U.S. Patent No. 5,120,827, the complete disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference. The technique employs an adduct of a substance such as a diol, e.g., 1,4-butane diol (BDO), and a catalyst for cationic polymerization, e.g., BF_3 -etherate. This adduct forms with the oxetane monomer an initiating species which undergoes chain extension until n moles of monomer have been incorporated in the molecule, n being the ratio of monomers to adduct present. By adjusting the ratio of monomers to adduct present, the average molecular weight of the polymer which forms may be adjusted. If two or more monomers are present, incorporation of the monomers will be generally random but may depend upon the relative reactivities of the monomers in the polymerization reaction.

[0034] Another suitable catalyst system includes co-catalytically effective quantities of one or more triethoxonium salts and one or more alcohols, as disclosed in U.S. Application No. 08/233,219, the complete disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference to the extent that the disclosure is compatible with this invention. Examples of triethoxonium salts include triethoxonium hexafluorophosphate, triethoxonium hexafluoroantimonate, and triethoxonium tetrafluoroborate.

[0035] It is understood that although the isocyanate-reactive terminal functional groups of the blocks are referred to herein as being hydroxyl groups, the isocyanate-reactive functional groups may also be amines, amides, and/or carboxyl groups.

[0036] The crystalline polyoxetane A blocks and amorphous B blocks, i.e., the respective prepolymers, are each end-capped together or separately with one or more diisocyanates. The end-capped A and B blocks are mixed together and joined by a linking compound which has a pair of isocyanate-reactive functionalities that are sufficiently unhindered to allow them to react with the free isocyanate moieties of the end-capped copolymers and thereby join the blocks together.

[0037] Oxetane, THF, and oxirane polymer blocks normally have terminal isocyanate-reactive (e.g., hydroxyl) functions which are end-capped with the diisocyanates in accordance with the invention. Preferably, a first one of the isocyanate moieties of the end-capping compound is substantially more reactive with the terminal-hydroxyl moieties of the polymer blocks than the other (e.g., second) isocyanate moiety. One of the problems with linking these types of polymer blocks is that substituted oxetane-derived hydroxyl end groups units have neopentyl structures, whereby the terminal primary hydroxyl moieties are substantially hindered and therefore less reactive. The blocks derived from the oxirane derivatives are secondary alcohols, making their hydroxyl groups less reactive than the primary hydroxyl group of the oxetane-derived A-block. The diisocyanate preferably is selected so that one of the isocyanate groups is capable of reacting with a hydroxyl-group of the polymer blocks while the other isocyanate moiety remains free and unreacted. Diisocyanates are preferably used because isocyanates of higher functionality would result in undesirable levels of cross-linking. The different reactivities of the isocyanate moieties ~~is~~ are desirable to ensure that substantial chain extension through linking of like blocks does not occur. Thus, for purposes of this invention, one isocyanate moiety of the diisocyanate should preferably be approximately five times more reactive with terminal hydroxyl groups of oxetane and oxirane blocks than the other group. Preferably one isocyanate moiety is at least about ten times more reactive than the other.

[0038] One diisocyanate which is especially useful for purposes of the invention is 2,4-toluene diisocyanate (TDI) in which the isocyanate moiety in the 4-position is substantially more reactive with hindered terminal hydroxyl moieties than the isocyanate moiety in the

2-position. Isophorone diisocyanate (IPDI) is suitable for some applications, though less so than TDI. Examples of diisocyanates which have not worked well include diphenylmethane diisocyanate (MDI) and hexamethylene diisocyanate (HDI).

[0039] In the end-capping reaction, the diisocyanate is used at an approximately stoichiometric molar amount relative to terminal hydroxyl groups on the polymer chain. Thus, if the polymer chain has a pair of terminal hydroxyl groups, approximately two molar equivalents, e.g., 1.75-2.2 molar equivalents of diisocyanate are used. In the ideal reaction, all of the more reactive isocyanate moieties would react with terminal hydroxyl groups, leaving all of the less reactive isocyanate moieties free. Practically, not all of the diisocyanate reacts in this manner, and some chain extension does occur. Thus, the end-capping reaction may be maximized for particular polymer chains by some adjustment in the relative molar ratios of polymer block and diisocyanate.

[0040] In one variant embodiment, the A blocks and B blocks are reacted separately with the diisocyanate, so that there is no competition of the blocks for diisocyanate molecules and each separate end-capping reaction may be carried to substantial completion. The diisocyanate may react more rapidly with one block than the other, but this difference can be compensated for by a longer reaction time with the slower reacting block. The reactivity of the terminal hydroxyl groups varies according to steric factors and also according to side-chain moieties. Energetic oxetanes, for example, generally have side-chain moieties that are electron-withdrawing, making their terminal hydroxyl groups less reactive. Once end-capped with diisocyanate, the reactivities of the polymers for linking purposes ~~is~~ are essentially dependent only upon the reactivity of the free isocyanate, not on the chemical makeup of the polymer chain itself. Thus end-capped (A) blocks are substantially as reactive as end-capped (B) blocks.

[0041] The end-capping reaction is promoted by a suitable urethane catalyst. A preferred class of catalysts include organic tin compounds with at least one and preferably two labile groups, such as chloride or acetate, bound directly to the tin. Suitable ~~tin-catalyst~~ catalysts include diphenyl tin dichloride, dibutyl tin dichloride, dibutyl tin dilaurate, dibutyl tin diacetate. Tertiary amine catalysts may also be used.

[0042] The linking compound is one which has two functional groups which are sufficiently unhindered to react with the free isocyanate moieties on the end-capped blocks so as to link A blocks to B blocks, A blocks to A blocks, and B blocks to B blocks in a urethane reaction. Preferred functional groups are hydroxyl groups, although amine, amide, and carboxyl groups, and mixtures thereof also react in a urethane reaction. Primary functional groups are preferred. The linking compound may be a short, straight carbon chain having terminal hydroxyl groups, e.g., 1,4-butanediol, 1,3-propanediol, ethylene glycol, and 1,6-hexanediol. The linking compound should also be ~~missible~~ miscible with and rapidly dissolve in the non-halogenated solvent so as to ensure chain extension without unwanted amounts of cross-linking.

[0043] Alternatively, the linking compound may be an oligomer, especially a urethane oligomer, having two functional groups which are sufficiently unhindered to react with the free isocyanate moieties on the end-capped blocks so as to link A blocks to B blocks, A blocks to A blocks, and B blocks to B blocks via a urethane reaction. Preferred functional groups of the oligomer are hydroxyl groups, although amine, amide, and carboxyl groups, and mixtures thereof also react in a urethane reaction. Primary functional groups are preferred.

[0044] An oligomeric glycol containing urethane moieties is preferably used to react the free isocyanate moieties on the end-capped blocks. The oligomeric glycol may be prepared from a mixture of one or more diisocyanates and an excess amount of one or more diols. The diisocyanate(s) and diol(s) selected and the ratio of these reagents may be varied to tailor the properties of the thermoplastic elastomer. The diol-to-diisocyanate molar ratio is preferably selected to be between 5:1 to 5:4, more preferably about 2:1, to maintain acceptable processing temperatures, obtain adequate linking of the isocyanate-capped prepolymers, and improve the thermomechanical properties of the final thermoplastic elastomer. A suitable urethane reaction catalyst promotes the reaction between the diisocyanate(s) and diol(s) to form oligomers. The catalysts discussed above in connection with the linking of the A and B blocks are suitable for this purpose. Representative diols that may be selected for preparing the difunctional oligomer include, by way of example, unbranched aliphatic diols having 2 to 7 carbon atoms, such as ethylene glycol, propylene glycol, butylene glycol; and cycloaliphatic diols such as 1,4-cyclohexanedimethanol, and any combination thereof. Representative diisocyanates for preparing the difunctional oligomer include, by way of example, aliphatic diisocyanates such as

hexane diisocyanate, and aryl diisocyanates such as methylene-bis(4-phenyl isocyanate), phenylene diisocyanate, toluene diisocyanate, and xylylene diisocyanate, and any combination thereof. Preferably, the difunctional oligomer has a number average molecular weight M_n of from 350 to 900.

[0045] It is to be appreciated that a wide variety of difunctional compounds may be used to link the end-capped blocks.

[0046] As in the end-capping reaction, some solvent is preferably used, as is a catalyst, such as described above. Conveniently, the reaction mixtures of the A blocks and B blocks may be mixed together without prior separation of the blocks from their respective end-capping reaction mixtures. The linking compound can be added directly to this mixture of A and B blocks. The catalyst is thereby already present when the linking compound is added.

[0047] The linking compound is added in an amount such that the total number of linking-compound functional groups approximately equals the total number of free isocyanate groups of the end-capped polymer blocks. Thus, to provide an $(AB)_n$ polymer with multiple blocks in each chain, the linking compound to polymer block molar ratio is in the range of 0.9-1.1, e.g., 1.0. Accordingly, optimal molar ratios of blocks and linking chemicals may have to be empirically determined.

[0048] The end-capping reaction and linking reaction are carried out in a suitable non-halogenated solvent, e.g., one which dissolves the polymer and does not react with the free isocyanate moieties. Although insubstantial amounts of halogenated solvent may be present, the solution is preferably completely free of any halogenated solvent. The non-halogenated solvent should not react in the urethane reaction and forms an azeotrope with water. Suitable dry solvents include cyclic ethers such as tetrahydrofuran (THF) and 1,4-dioxane; non-cyclic ethers such as ethylene glycol dimethyl ether; ketones such as methyl ethyl ketone ("MEK"); and esters such as ethyl acetate. Of these, THF is preferred because of its excellent solubility characteristics.

[0049] In a preferred embodiment, the solvent forms an azeotrope with water. In this preferred embodiment, after the blocks are dissolved in excess non-halogenated solvent, the solution may be dried by azeotropic distillation of the solvent, and optionally further concentrated, e.g., via distillation, in the solution to increase the volumetric loading and reaction

rate. The blocks then may be end-capped, separately or together, and linked in the same or a different non-halogenated solvent. By distilling off excess solvent to remove ~~water~~, water, a subsequent reaction with a diisocyanate may proceed without significant interference from competing reactions between the isocyanate moieties and water. Additionally, the solution remains homogeneous and further distillation serves to concentrate the polymer solution, producing higher reaction rates and requiring less reactor capacity. The reaction rates may be improved by conducting the end-capping reaction at elevated temperatures, such as 30°C to 80°C, more preferably 40°C to 60°C. The process may be conducted by a batch or continuous method. For example, the prepolymer and catalyst solution may be continuously fed through a mixer/extruder into which is injected a diisocyanate and a diol at appropriate rates and positions so that urethane linking occurs within the extruder and energetic thermoplastic elastomer is continuously produced for processing.

[0050] In the end-capping and block linking steps, the reaction can be followed with NMR and IR. With NMR, the urethane-forming reaction can be followed through the methylene groups on the polymer adjacent to the terminal hydroxyl groups. With IR, the change from isocyanate to urethane can be directly followed.

[0051] Synthesis of polyoxetanes is described in U.S. Patent Nos. 4,483,978 and 4,806,613, the complete disclosures of which are incorporated herein by reference to the extent that these disclosures are compatible with the present invention.

[0052] The invention will now be described in greater detail by way of the following examples, which are not to be construed as exhaustive as to the scope of this invention.

[0053] As referred to herein, "dry" means that less than 1 wt% water was present.

[0054] For the following experiments, poly(azidomethyloxirane) was supplied by 3M ~~Speciality~~ Specialty Chemicals of St. Paul, MN (Lot L-12564). Unless otherwise specified, all other materials were obtained from Aldrich of Milwaukee, WI.

EXAMPLE 1 (poly(3,3-bis(azidomethyl)oxetane))

[0055] A 5 liter jacketed flask equipped with a mechanical stirrer was charged with 600 grams of tribromoneopentylalcohol (AmeriBrom, Inc. of New York), 1200 ml of toluene, and 6 grams of tetrabutylammonium bromide. The mixture was cooled to 12°C and 193 grams of

sodium hydroxide was added dropwise as a 40 wt% solution keeping the temperature at 12°C. After 36 hours the reaction mixture was washed with water until the pH was less than 9 to obtain the crude product which was distilled to obtain 3,3-bis(bromomethyl)oxetane at 65% yield.

[0056] A 5 liter jacketed flask equipped with a mechanical stirrer was charged with 1450 grams of the 3,3-bis(bromomethyl)oxetane and 1720 ml of toluene. The mixture was stirred and heated to 60°C before 1600 ml of water, 14.7 grams of tetrabutylammonium bromide, and 862 grams of sodium azide were added. After 24 hours, the reaction mixture was cooled to room temperature and washed three times with 2000 ml of water. The toluene and water were removed from the organic layer by distillation to give pure 3,3-bis(azidomethyl)oxetane at 85% yield.

[0057] Under an argon atmosphere, 14.94 grams of butane diol was added to a flame dried 5 liter round-bottomed flask charged with 1340 ml of dry methylene chloride. To this mixture, 11.77 grams of borontrifluoride-etherate was added and the reaction was allowed to proceed for one hour at room temperature. The reactor was then cooled to -10°C and 937.78 grams of the 3,3-bis(azidomethyl)oxetane was added. The solution was allowed to come to room temperature and left to react for three days. The reaction was then quenched by the addition of 50 ml of saturated brine solution. The organic phase was separated off and washed with 100 ml of 10 wt% sodium bicarbonate solution before the solvent was removed on a rotovapor. The resulting liquid was then poured into 5 liters of methanol to precipitate the polymer, which was filtered from the solution and dried under vacuum at 30°C.

EXAMPLE 2 (poly(3-azidomethyl-3-methyloxetane))

[0058] A 5 liter jacketed flask equipped with a mechanical stirrer was charged with 1062 grams of sodium azide, 1972 ml of water, and 2450 grams of 3-bromomethyl-3-methyloxetane (supplied by AmeriBrom, Inc. of New York). This mixture was brought to reflux with vigorous mixing. After 48 hours the mixture was cooled to room temperature. The organic layer was separated off and washed three times with 1000 ml of water before being dried over molecular sieves to yield pure 3-azidomethyl-3-methyloxetane at 85% yield.

[0059] Under an argon atmosphere, 14.94 grams of butane diol was added to a flame dried 5 liter round-bottomed flask charged with 1.340 ml of dry methylene chloride. To this

mixture, 11.77 grams of borontrifluoride-etherate was added and the reaction was allowed to proceed for one hour at room temperature. The reactor was then cooled to -10°C and 937.78 grams of the 3-azidomethyl-3-methyloxetane was added. The solution was allowed to come to room temperature and left to react for three days. The reaction was then quenched by the addition of 50 ml of saturated brine solution. The organic phase was separated off and washed with 100 ml of 10 wt% sodium bicarbonate solution before the solvent was removed on a rotovapor. The resulting liquid was then poured into 5 liters of methanol to precipitate the polymer, which was filtered from the solution and dried under vacuum at 30°C.

EXAMPLE 3 (Random block copolymer of poly(3-azidomethyl-3-methyloxetane) and poly(3,3-bis(azidomethyl)oxetane) in THF)

[0060] In a one liter round bottom flask, 65 grams of dry difunctional poly(3-azidomethyl-3-methyloxetane) with a hydroxyl equivalent weight of 3121 and 35 grams of dry poly(3,3-bis(azidomethyl)oxetane) with a hydroxyl equivalent weight of 3235 were dissolved in 650 grams of dry tetrahydrofuran. The solution was concentrated and dried by evaporation of the tetrahydrofuran under reduced pressure via a rotovapor until 100 grams of the solvent remained. To this solution, 0.1 grams of diphenyltin dichloride and 5.41 grams of toluene-2,4-diisocyanate were added while stirring with a magnetic stirrer at ambient temperature and pressure. After 24 hours, 1.40 grams of butane-1,4-diol was added causing the solution to become steadily more viscous. After another 24 hours, the solution was poured into methanol in a volume ratio of 1:5. The methanol was decanted off, and the precipitated polymer was washed three times with fresh methanol (1:5 volume ratio) to give a rubbery granular product with the properties set forth below:

Mn = 20480

Mw = 120800

Mw/Mn = 5.9

E^{1.0} (psi) = 754

ε_m (%) = 204

ε_f (failure) (%) = 229

σ_m (psi) = 180

σ_m (corrected) (psi) = 558

ShoreA = 64

EXAMPLE 4 (Random block copolymer of poly(3-azidomethyl-3-methyloxetane) and poly(3,3-bis(azidomethyl)oxetane) in THF)

[0061] In a 100 ml round bottom flask, 6.5 grams of dry difunctional poly(3-azidomethyl-3-methyloxetane) with a hydroxyl equivalent weight of 3040 and 3.5 grams of dry poly(3,3-bis(azidomethyl)oxetane) with a hydroxyl equivalent weight of 3235 were dissolved in 60 ml of dry tetrahydrofuran. The solution was concentrated and dried by evaporation of the tetrahydrofuran under reduced pressure via a rotovapor until 10 grams of the solvent remained. To this solution, 0.25 ml of dibutyltin dilaurate and 0.561 grams of toluene-2,4-diisocyanate were added while stirring with a magnetic stirrer at ambient temperature and pressure. After 15 minutes, 0.145 grams of butane-1,4-diol was added causing the solution to become steadily more viscous. After another 30 minutes, the solution was poured into methanol in a volume ratio of 1:5. The methanol was decanted off, and the precipitated polymer was washed three times with fresh methanol (1:5 volume ratio) to give a rubbery granular product with the properties set forth below:

Mn = 15404

Mw = 67277

Mw/Mn = 4.37

EXAMPLE 5 (Random block copolymer of poly(3-azidomethyl-3-methyloxetane) and poly(3,3-bis(azidomethyl)oxetane) in 1,4-dioxane)

[0062] In a 100 ml round bottom flask, 6.5 grams of dry difunctional poly(3-azidomethyl-3-methyloxetane) with a hydroxyl equivalent weight of 3040 and 3.5 grams of dry poly(3,3-bis(azidomethyl)oxetane) with a hydroxyl equivalent weight of 3235 were dissolved in 60 ml of dry 1,4-dioxane. The solution was concentrated and dried by evaporation of the 1,4-dioxane under reduced pressure via a rotovapor until 12 grams of the solvent remained. To this solution, 0.3 ml of dibutyltin dilaurate and 0.561 grams of toluene-2,4-diisocyanate were added while stirring with a magnetic stirrer at ambient

temperature and pressure. After one hour, 0.145 grams of butane-1,4-diol was added causing the solution to become steadily more viscous. After another two hours, the solution was poured into methanol in a volume ratio of 1:5. The methanol was decanted off, and the precipitated polymer was washed three times with fresh methanol (1:5 volume ratio) to give a rubbery granular product with the properties set forth below:

Mn = 21230

Mw = 116272

Mw/Mn = 5.48

EXAMPLE 6 (Random block copolymer of poly(3-azidomethyl-3-methyloxetane) and poly(3,3-bis(azidomethyl)oxetane) in ethyl acetate)

[0063] In a 500 ml round bottom flask, 18 grams of dry difunctional poly(3-azidomethyl-3-methyloxetane) with a hydroxyl equivalent weight of 3356 and 6 grams of dry poly(3,3-bis(azidomethyl)oxetane) with a hydroxyl equivalent weight of 3235 were dissolved in 200 ml of dry ethyl acetate. The solution was concentrated and dried by evaporation of the ethyl acetate under reduced pressure via a rotovapor until 34 grams of the solvent remained. To this solution at 40°C, 0.024 grams of diphenyltin dichloride and 1.26 grams of toluene-2,4-diisocyanate were added while stirring with a magnetic stirrer. After one hour, 0.33 grams of butane-1,4-diol was added causing the solution to become steadily more viscous. After another 48 hours, the solution was poured into methanol in a volume ratio of 1:5. The methanol was decanted off, and the precipitated polymer was washed three times with fresh methanol (1:5 volume ratio) to give a rubbery granular product with the properties set forth below:

Mn = 13880

Mw = 43310

Mw/Mn = 3.12

EXAMPLE 7 (Random block copolymer of poly(3-azidomethyl-3-methyloxetane) and poly(3,3-bis(azidomethyl)oxetane) in THF)

[0064] In a 100 ml round bottom flask, 6.5 grams of dry difunctional poly(3-azidomethyl-3-methyloxetane) with a hydroxyl equivalent weight of 3040 and 3.5 grams

of dry poly(3,3-bis(azidomethyl)oxetane) with a hydroxyl equivalent weight of 3235 were dissolved in 70 ml of dry tetrahydrofuran. The solution was concentrated and dried by evaporation of the tetrahydrofuran under reduced pressure via a rotovapor at 50°C until 5 grams of the solvent remained. To this solution at 50°C, 0.5 ml of dibutyltin dilaurate and 0.561 grams of toluene-2,4-diisocyanate were added while stirring with a magnetic stirrer. After three minutes, 0.145 grams of butane-1,4-diol was added causing the solution to become steadily more viscous. After another five minutes, the solution was diluted with 20 ml of tetrahydrofuran and 1 ml of methanol. This solution was then precipitated in methanol in a volume ratio of 1:5. The methanol was decanted off, and the precipitated polymer was washed three times with fresh methanol (1:5 volume ratio) to give a rubbery granular product with the properties set forth below:

Mn = 17350

Mw = 103231

Mw/Mn = 5.95

EXAMPLE 8 (Random block copolymer of poly(azidomethyloxirane) and poly(3,3-bis(azidomethyl)oxetane))

[0065] In a 25 ml round bottom flask, a urethane oligomer was prepared by dissolving 1.55 grams of toluene-2,4-diisocyanate in 4 ml tetrahydrofuran and adding to the solution 0.1 ml of dibutyltin dilaurate followed by 1.60 grains of butane-1,4-diol. This reaction mixture was stirred for 1 hour at room temperature.

[0066] In a separate 250 ml round bottom flask, 17.94 grams of dry difunctional poly(azidomethyloxirane) with a hydroxyl equivalent weight of 1174 and 6.63 grams of dry poly(3,3-bis(azidomethyl)oxetane) with a hydroxyl equivalent weight of 2390 were dissolved in 100 ml of dry tetrahydrofuran. The solution was concentrated and dried by evaporation of the tetrahydrofuran under reduced pressure via a rotovapor until 20 grams of the solvent remained. To this solution, 75 ml of dibutyltin dilaurate and 3.097 grams of toluene-2,4-diisocyanate were added while stirring with a magnetic stirrer at ambient temperature and pressure. After one hour, the urethane oligomer was added to this solution, causing the solution to become steadily more viscous. After 20 minutes, the solution was too viscous to stir and was diluted with 20 ml of dry

tetrahydrofuran and allowed to react for a ~~further~~ an additional 20 minutes before being poured into methanol in a volume ratio of 1:5. The methanol was decanted off, and the precipitated polymer was washed three times with fresh methanol (1:5 volume ratio) to give a rubbery granular product with the properties shown in FIGS. 1 and 2 and set forth below:

Mn = 26240

Mw = 175500

Mw/Mn = 6.69

[0067] Molecular weight distribution was determined by gel permeation ~~chromatography~~ chromatography using polystyrene standards, with the results shown in FIG. 1. The GPC trace in FIG. 1 demonstrates that the prepolymers were linked to produce a copolymer having a higher molecular weight and dispersivity than the homopolymer blocks. The DMA trace in FIG. 2 shows the melt transition of random block $(\text{BAMO-GAP})_n$ at 75-80°C with a material ~~modululs~~ modulus reducing only slowly before this point.

EXAMPLES 9-11 (Random block copolymer of poly(3-azidomethyl-3-methyloxetane) and poly(3,3-bis(azidomethyl)oxetane) linked with a urethane oligomer)

[0068] In a 500 ml round bottom flask, 45 grams of difunctional poly(3-azidomethyl-3-methyloxetane) with a hydroxyl equivalent weight of 3125 and 15 grams of poly(3,3-bis(azidomethyl)oxetane) with a hydroxyl equivalent weight of 3152 were dissolved in 300 ml of tetrahydrofuran. The solution was concentrated and dried by evaporation of the tetrahydrofuran or a rotovapor until a solution with 90 grams of solvent remained. To this solution 0.6 grams of dibutyltin dichloride and 3.34 grams of toluene-2,4-diisocyanate was ~~added~~ added, and the mixture was allowed to react for 3 hours to end-cap the prepolymer.

[0069] For Example 9, 0.22 grams of butanediol was added to one quarter of the isocyanate end-capped prepolymer mixture. The reaction was allowed to continue for 14 hours before it was precipitated with methanol in a volume ratio of 1:5. The methanol was decanted off, and the precipitated polymer was washed three times with fresh methanol (1:5 volume ratio) to give a rubbery granular product.

[0070] For Example 10, a urethane oligomer was derived from a mixture of 2 ml of tetrahydrofuran, 0.42 grams of toluene-2,4-diisocyanate, 0.43 grams of butane-1,4-diol, and 0.1

grams of dibutyltin dichloride, which were allowed to react for one hour. The urethane oligomer was then added to one quarter of the isocyanate end-capped prepolymer mixture and allowed to react for 14 hours before it was precipitated with methanol in a volume ratio of 1:5. The methanol was decanted off, and the precipitated polymer was washed three times with fresh methanol (1:5 volume ratio) to give a rubbery granular product.

[0071] For Example 11, a urethane oligomer was derived from a mixture of 2 ml of tetrahydrofuran, 0.83 grams of toluene-2,4-diisocyanate, 0.65 grams of butane-1,4-diol, and 0.1 grams of dibutyltin dichloride, which were allowed to react for one hour. The urethane oligomer was then added to one quarter of the isocyanate end-capped prepolymer mixture and allowed to react for 14 hours before it was precipitated with methanol in a volume ratio of 1:5. The methanol was decanted off, and the precipitated polymer was washed three times with fresh methanol (1:5 volume ratio) to give a rubbery granular product.

TABLE

	Example 9	Example 10	Example 11
diol:diisocyanate molar ratio	1:0	2:1	3:2
Mn	11440	12340	13240
Mw	134800	142000	122600
Mw/Mn	11.78	11.51	9.26
E ^{1.0}	520	669	823
ε _m (%)	311	897	536
ε _f (failure) (%)	372	1082	562
σ _m (psi)	153	345	300
σ _m (corrected) (psi)	678	3575	2381
ShoreA	49	60	65

[0072] The foregoing detailed description of the preferred embodiments of the invention has been provided for the purpose of explaining the principles of the invention and its practical application, thereby enabling others skilled in the art to understand the invention for various embodiments and with various modifications as are suited to the particular use contemplated. The foregoing detailed description is not intended to be exhaustive or to limit the invention to the precise embodiments disclosed. Modifications and equivalents will be apparent

to practitioners skilled in this art and are encompassed within the spirit and scope of the appended claims.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

A method is provided for preparing thermoplastic elastomers. A blocks of the thermoplastic elastomers are crystalline at temperatures below about 60°C and are derived from oxetane derivatives and/or tetrahydrofuran derivatives. B blocks of the thermoplastic elastomer are amorphous above about -20°C and are derived from oxetanes, tetrahydrofuran, oxiranes, and derivatives thereof. According to this method, the A and B blocks are dissolved into solution containing a non-halogenated solvent, preferably tetrahydrofuran, then dried by azeotropic distillation. The dried blocks are end-capped with a diisocyanate, preferably a diisocyanate having one isocyanate moiety substantially more reactive with the terminal groups of the blocks than the other isocyanate moiety of the diisocyanate. The end-capped blocks are then linked together with a linking compound.